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Making Sense of Macro-Regional Strategies in the EU

Differentiated Integration and the Macro-Regions' External Dimension

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Master Thesis

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SUMMARY

The Treaty of Lisbon stated with its enforcement in 2009 the need for the European Union (EU) to focus on territorial cohesion to strengthen the European Integration process. Even though it is not stated by term in the Treaty, the idea of macro-regions and macro-regional strategies developed from a pilot project to a new fashionable way of alternative integration. Instead of a common integration process with all EU member states involved, a macro-region only involves some states that share the same challenges and are most of the time clustered around environmental aspects like sea, mountains or rivers. Due to the fact that common challenges, especially with regard to environmental issues do not end with the internal borders of the EU, non-EU countries can also be part of EU macro-regions. The external dimension of the macro-regional strategies can vary not only in the number of third countries but also in the areas of responsibility. The three cases of the EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region, Danube Region and Adriatic-Ionian Region serve as central cases for investigating not only the macro-regional strategies itself but also the different compositions of the external dimension.

The development of EU macro-regions can be linked to the theory of differentiated integration. This alternative integration approach is not in need of all member states but focuses more on a certain group of countries that intensify their cooperation with regard to specific matters which are not applying to the whole EU. One argues that the process of macro-regional strategies would strengthen this process and a multi-speed Europe could arise. The research at hand analyses the link between those two variables with the special focus upon the external dimension.

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LIST OF ACRONYMS

Acronym	Definition
AII	Adriatic-Ionian Initiative
ASEAN	Association of South East Asian Nations
AA	Association Agreement
BDF	Baltic Development Forum
BSR	Baltic Sea Region
CBSS	Council of the Baltic Sea States
DCFTA	Deep Comprehensive Free Trade Agreement
EEA	European Economic Area
EUBAM	EU Border and Assistance Mission
EaP	Eastern Partnership
EU	European Union
EMU	European Monetary Union
ENP	European Neighborhood Policy
ENPI	European Neighborhood and Partnership Instrument
ESDP	European Security and Defense Policy
EUSAIR	EU Strategy for the Adriatic and Ionian Region
EUSBSR	EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region
EUSDR	EU Strategy for the Danube Region
FOCJ	Functionally Overlapping Competing Jurisdiction
HALs	Horizontal Action Leaders
HELCOM	Helsinki Commission
HLG	High Level Group
IMP	Integrated Maritime Policy
IPA	Instrument for Pre-accession Assistance
IR	International Relations
MCSR	Multiple Case Study Research Design
MRS	Macro-regional strategies
MLG	Multi-Level Governance
NCP	National Contact Point
ND	Northern Dimension
PAs	Priority Areas

PACs	Priority Action Coordinators
PCA	Partnership and Cooperation Agreement
RCC	Regional Cooperation Council
SAP	Stabilization and Association Process
SECI	Stability Pact for South Eastern European and South East Cooperation Initiative
UBC	Union of the Baltic Cities
VASAP	Vision and Strategies around the Baltic Sea (VASAP)

1. INTRODUCTION

“The European Union is too big to devise integrative schemes that will sustain collective action problems which are likely to result from such diverse membership in terms of socio-economic, geopolitical, cultural and political parameters”

(Gänzle & Kern, 2011, p. 2).

The establishment of the first European macro-regional strategy in 2009 resulted out of the necessity to create deeper territorial cooperation. This can be regarded as long overdue as already more than 50 years ago regional differences within a territory have been recognized which can also be seen in the Treaty of Rome (Roy & Domínguez, 2008). With the creation of the European Economic Community, these differences have been acknowledged and the European integration process and the evolution of the regional focus grew closer together. The Benelux Union can be regarded as one of the origins of macro regions in the European Union. The Netherlands, Belgium and Luxembourg realized the advantages of a closer cooperation and initiated the Benelux Union in 1949 quite early (Wouters, Van Langehove, Vidaal, De Lombaerde, & Wouter, 2007).

Even though the idea and actual implementation of macro regions have taken more of a backseat, with the EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region (EUBSRS) the idea of macro regions arose again to strengthen certain policy fields in a limited number of EU member and even non-EU member states. Are we going back to the Benelux roots of integration?

Although the new and modern macro-regional development is not linked to the traditional Benelux Union and is set up as a pilot project, the approach seems similar. However, one has to question whether a Union with 28 member states has the same potential to still grow to an ever closer Union? Is it actually possible to support a common integration on such an unequal basis of involved countries?

The core idea of a macro region and its strategy is among others to cooperate with other countries that have similar cultures, economies and geographic factors (Schymik, 2011). This clustering of states forms a backward trend to the European integration process and only partly integration phases take place. Even though the idea behind macro regions is

to foster the integration process of the European Union, it is possible that the opposite effect ensues and disintegration rather than integration come about.

Alternative integration approaches like differentiated integration arose that support the assumption of a partly EU integration with just a number of states involved. This integration approach also covers the inclusion of Non-EU member states and how the different composition of countries can have an impact upon the integration process in the European Union.

The following part gives more details about the macro-regional strategy development in the EU and offers an overview of the already existing and possible future macro regions. This outline gives the necessary background for understanding the case selection which is presented in the methodological part.

1.1 Background: Macro-Regional Strategies - Towards a Multi-Speed Europe?

The EU strategy for the Baltic Sea Region has been implemented in 2009 as a pilot strategy for an intensified transnational cooperation. Although the Baltic Sea Region can look back on a long way of cooperation and a high number of institutions coping with the Baltic Sea's environmental challenges, the EU strategy has been introduced to limit the ineffective and uncoordinated cooperation within the Region. After the establishment of the EUSBSR, the European Council endorsed another macro-regional strategy resulting in the Danube Macro region. More initiatives and discussions of further macro regional strategies arise which demonstrates that the model of macro regions has gained attention in the European Union. The European Commission does not regard the first two official macro regions as pure "test cases" for the practical accomplishment of the intentions of territorial cohesion within the European Union but rather as 'pilot projects' which can be applied to further cross-border regions within the Union (Wulf, 2012). The European Parliament agrees upon this approach and values macro regional strategies as a "model for coordinating EU policies and funding in geopolitical territorial units" (European Parliament, 2011, p. 2).

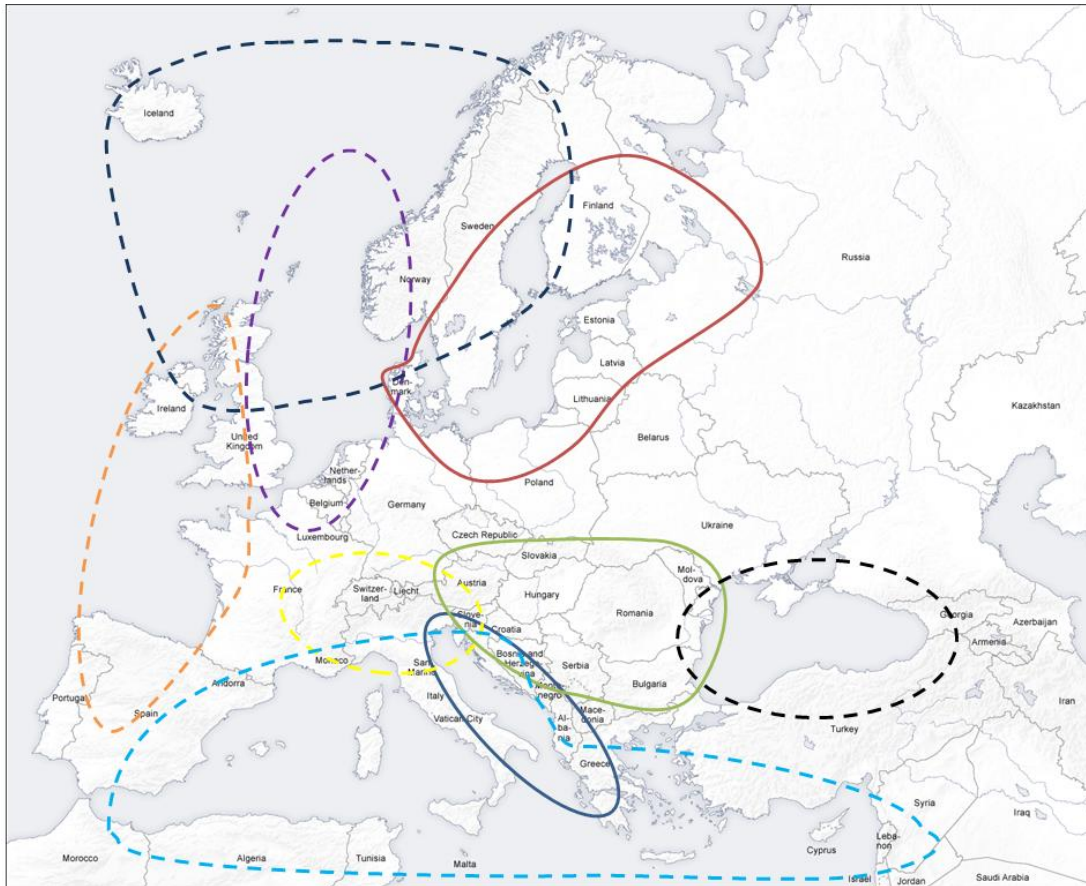
With the realization of these two strategies a macro-regional fever started and all over the EU territory new macro-regional strategies have been designed by member states as well as non-EU states. The EU Strategy for the Adriatic-Ionian Region is regarded as the next official EU strategy next to the EUSBSR and the EUSDR.

According to Schymik (2011), the Union is currently involved in nine macro-regional strategies (see Table 1), two of them are already implemented. All the strategies show similarities with regard to the environmental challenges they want to solve and the improvement they want to achieve. However, having a look at the actual composition of the different macro-regional strategies it is obvious that not only the total number of countries does vary but also the quantity of non-EU states. The Atlantic Arc consists in total of five member states; the North Sea Region has six Member States and Norway as non-EU state. Even though the Alps and Baltic Sea Region have both three non-EU member states, the majority number of states still belongs to the European Union. Taking a look at the other macro-regional strategies it is obvious that except for the North-Atlantic Region (four member states and four non-EU states) all macro-regions have a majority of states that do not belong to the European Union and can be categorized differently: The Mediterranean Region (eight member states and 17 non-EU states) and the Black Sea Region (two member states and four non-EU states) can be regarded more to the EU Neighborhood Areas due to the fact that most of the involved states belong to the realm of the EU Neighborhood Policy. The Adriatic-Ionian Region can be linked to the European Enlargement Policy Area as four out of seven states are possible new member states. Table 1 gives an overview of the macro-regional strategies and shows the different number of included EU and non-EU states. Graphic 1 also gives a geographic overview to demonstrate the positions of different regions. The graphic helps to highlight that with the realization of all macro-regional strategies, some countries like Croatia would be included in more than one strategy. Looking at the map one obvious aspect is the natural characteristic that is connected to all of the strategies. Except for the Alpine region, every macro region is connected to either a sea basin or river that connects the different states to commonly challenged geographic areas. The Alps region is the only macro region that is linked to an overburden. Both the table and the map highlight the high inclusion of non-EU countries. Even though the strategies ought to be called strategies set up by the European Union it is striking to see how many non-EU countries are involved or planned to be included. The Mediterranean macro region is the most extreme example by having a majority of non-EU states in their strategy. However one may not forget that the inclusion of the countries is primarily formed by their geographical position and the common challenges that link the region together. Even though this inclusion of non-EU countries can be explained on this ground, it is still open to discussion to what extent these different countries can have an

influence upon the macro-regional strategies in general, whether they benefit from the inclusion or slow down the realization process.

	EU Member states	Non-EU states
EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region	Denmark, Sweden, Finland, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Germany	Russia
EU Strategy for the Danube Region	Romania, Bulgaria, Hungary, Slovenia, Slovakia, Czech Republic, Austria, Germany, Croatia	Bosnia-Herzegovina, Moldavia, Montenegro, Serbia, Ukraine
EU Strategy for the Adriatic-Ionian	Italy, Slovenia, Greece, Croatia	Bosnia-Herzegovina, Montenegro, Albania, Serbia
EU Strategy for the Mediterranean	Spain, France, Italy, Slovenia, Greece, Malta, Cyprus, Great Britain (Gibraltar), Croatia	Morocco, Mauretania, Algeria, Tunisia, Libya, Egypt, Israel, Palestinian Territories, Lebanon, Syria, Jordan, Turkey, Albania, Montenegro, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Monaco
EU Strategy for the Black Sea	Bulgaria, Romania	Turkey, Georgia, Russia, Ukraine
EU Strategy for the Alps	France, Germany, Austria, Italy, Slovenia	Switzerland, Lichtenstein, Monaco
EU Strategy for the Atlantic Arc	Portugal, Spain, France, Great Britain, Ireland	
EU Strategy for the North Sea	France, Great Britain, Belgium, the Netherlands, Germany, Denmark	Norway
EU Strategy for the North Atlantic	Great Britain, Sweden, Ireland, Finland	Norway, Iceland, Faroe Islands (DK), Greenland (DK)

Table 1: Overview of already implemented and potential EU macro-regional strategies



Adopted EU MRS

EUSBSR



EUSDR



Next EU strategies:

EUSAIR



Potential MRS

Alpine Strategy



Atlantic Strategy



North Sea Strategy



North Atlantic Strategy



Black Sea Strategy



Mediterranean Strategy



Graphic 1: Overview of current and potential EU Macro Regions

The initial EU macro-regional strategies as well as possible future ones show that except for the Atlantic Arc Region, all of the strategies have or are planning to involve non-EU countries. Due to the fact that the association with non-EU countries can mainly be explained as a consequence of geopolitical reasons (common challenges), the number of EU and non-EU countries can vary to a very high extent (Schymik, 2011). With the two implemented strategies, it is interesting to see that not only the number of non-EU countries varies but also the scope of actual contribution and involvement regarding the strategy. As Russia's role is quite limited in the first EU macro-regional

strategy, the non-EU countries of the following strategy can be considered as more involved. This aspect is quite striking owing to the fact that the Commission clearly stated that the EUSBSR is an EU initiative that “does not commit non-Member States” (European Commission, 2011b, p. 6). This EU decision could be regarded as acceptable if it applies to all of the strategies. Six non EU-countries of the EUSDR conceded equivalent participation in the macro-regional strategy.

Even though further research can only base upon a vague interpretation of the current situation as further strategies are not officially implemented yet, it can be argued that current and upcoming strategies within the European Union can lead to divergent dynamics among the different regions and even favor a multi-speed Europe (Cugusi, 2013). This could have an influence on the integration process in the European Union.

The following literature review offers from a critical point of view an overview of the already published scientific work but also the lack of research that has been conducted in the field of the new territorial cooperation. The review serves as a map for guiding through the scientific world of alternative integration and macro-regionalization towards the scientific gaps of this new approach. The next part introduces the central research question of this thesis, followed by relevant sub-questions which give the overall research a fitting frame.

1.2. Literature Review

This part gives an overview of the already published scientific literature of macro-regional strategies and alternative/flexible integration. On the one hand it shows in how far the topic of macro-regional strategies is already covered and on the other hand it also tries to demonstrate the literature and scientific gap with regard to macro-regional strategies, the external dimension of these strategies and impacts upon differentiated integration. Hence, this part illustrates the formation of the topic and research of this thesis.

Johannes Hahn, the European Commissioner for Regional Policy states in 2012 that “an integrated approach, with coordination of actions across policy areas will achieve better results than individual initiatives. Where groups of countries and regions choose to come together to achieve common goals, this will also strengthen EU cohesion”

(Committee of the Regions, 2010). The European Commissioner marked the way for defining macro regions in the European Union. This definition has been taken over in further scientific researches.

The European Union has the responsibility to intensify territorial cooperation and to encourage cross-border and transnational integration. Even though a united cooperation between states is still central, the focus shifts to separate groups of states instead of the original idea of the EU of an ever closer Union of 28 member states (Weiler, 1999). The development of the European Union, the Treaties and important integration events like the European Monetary Union have been intensively discussed by various authors like Burgess (2013) or Hix and Hoyland (2011). An alternative approaches to the current integration processes, deadlocks or even disintegration processes are rather low.

The European integration process has passed through different phases and seems to reach a critical point in its development. In particular the financial crisis of 2009 can also be regarded as a crisis of European integration. Even though for example Bideleux and Taylor (2013) mention the term of disintegration in the European Union, the Euro Crisis actually restarts the discussion by strengthening the term of disintegration which leads to regained attention for alternative European integration (McNamara, 2010; Webber, 2013). The steady known integration process of the European Union seems to come to an end. However, disintegrative moments like the Dutch referendum on the Treaty establishing a Constitution for Europe also demonstrates that these disintegrative moments do not necessarily stop the integration process (Krastev, 2012; Rittberger & Schimmelfennig, 2005). One can argue that the deeper the EU integrates, the more it actually gains. The focus is on a fast growing and ever closer European Union (Taggart, 2006; Telò, 2012).

This supports a very normative idea of the European Integration development, a Union as it should be. This can be regarded from a very critical point of view. The Union of today does not begin from a neutral starting point anymore but has already been shaped and influenced by historical developments and a steadily growing Union with dissimilar nation states. With its growing number of member states, the EU has developed to a more heterogeneous Union and e.g. the decision-making capability becomes more problematical as the problems and preferences of the various member states vary (Scharpf, 2013; Sedelmeier, 2011). As the speed of the integration process slows down, it is important to look at some alternatives. One should be aware that the traditional and initial way of the integration approach is not that effective anymore. This assumption

can be supported by Moravcsik who argues that with the enlargement process, in particular in 2004, the ever closer Union is challenged and the democratic process has slowed down (Moravcsik & Schimmelfennig, 2009).

One of the alternative integration theories is differentiated integration which explains the European integration development as a process which is not in need of all member states to take part in every integration project or that permits member states to realize European policies at their own speed (Junge, 2007).

“Differentiated integration exists in the European Union since the establishment of the Rome Treaty, but only in the last ten years became a new direction of European Integration” (Koller, 2012, p. 1). Even though this alternative integration theory already exists for quite a while, Schimmelfennig, Leuffen, and Rittberger (2011) argue how poor this concept is actually reviewed. They argue that ‘closer’ and ‘enhanced cooperation’ can be regarded as a form of differentiated integration (Koller, 2011) but that the traditional integration theories still dominate the explanation of the European integration process. The question arises whether differentiated integration is actually an alternative approach of the integration process or whether it even leads to a backward trend. How much differentiation can the European Union actually tolerate?

According to De Neve (2007), the current European integration reminds one of an onion that is “a visualization of governance in Europe segmented not only by policy areas and levels of government – as has been the conventional wisdom – but also by subgroups of European states” (De Neve, 2007, p. 504). Kollar (2012) argues that the integration process in the European Union does not only become differentiated due to the decision-making but also due to the different member states (Koller, 2012).

With the Treaty of Lisbon, the differentiated integration could be strengthened with regard to primary law and the intensification of enhanced cooperation. With this amendment, the discussion about the theory restarted but the empirical analysis of differentiated integration can be mainly found in primary law, in particular related to the significant cases of e.g. the European Monetary Union (EMU) and the Schengen Agreement, hence in a historical review (Avbelj, 2012).

In general, this alternative approach is regarded as an integration process where only a limited number of EU states participate and the possibilities for opt-outs and the exclusion from the e.g. EMU is allowed. With regard to the transformed method of enhanced cooperation, the international divorce law could be amended in terms of 14 member states that started to build up a stronger cooperation in that field. The inclusion

of non-EU states is a common approach. It is argued that the development of differentiated integration is a natural phenomenon resulting from the too big and increasingly heterogenic European Union (De Neve, 2007). Although differentiated integration can be examined on the basis of EU primary law, up to now research goes hardly beyond this point by e.g. investigating differentiated integration in terms of secondary law. With regard to the traditional theories it is also difficult to fully understand the nature of the flexible theory. Can this theory be regarded as a new theory? Or even as an alternative to the traditional ones? It is argued that all theories of European integration are in need of modification to express an acceptable analysis of the development of differentiated integration (Koller, 2012).

While treaty-based elucidations dominate the field of differentiated integration, the interpretation of secondary law is rather untouched. The set up of the so-called macro-regional strategies could be interpreted as a new outcome of differentiated integration.

Macro-regional strategies are in discussion to be a new link to the theory of differentiation. Ahner states that “macro-regional strategies [are necessary] to promote the European integration and not to divide Europe” (Mediterranean Commission, 2013, p. 2). Even though it cannot be stated as legally binding, macro-regional strategies show many similarities to the renewed discussion about differentiated integration.

It seems that the idea of macro-regional strategies in the European Union came a little bit of a surprise to the academic world. Even after the realization of the EUSBSR, policy documents, news articles and Communications were the dominant source of information. The discussion paper ‘Macro-regional strategies in the European Union’ by Samecki (2009) is actually the first paper that shed some light on the rather unexplored topic. Before this strategy was actually implemented, one argued on the added value of the strategy and possible challenges which could arise (Bengtsson, 2009). With the EUSBSR, the governance structure of macro-regional strategies (MRS) became a central issue. The multi-level governance approach by Hooghe and Marks (Hooghe & Marks, 2001, 2003, 2008) is according to Koller (2012) necessary for elaborating the special position of macro regions in the European Union. In the vertical specification of integration the macro-regional strategies can be categorized as a new level of governance that is situated between the national state and the supranational level with the opportunity to coordinate vertical as well as horizontal issues in an effective manner. Taking into account Type I and II of Multi-Level Governance (MLG) defined by Marks one can argue that the macro-regional cooperation can be positioned between

these two types as a kind of `hybrid` (Metzger & Schmitt, 2012; Nacchial, 2011). With the implementation of the Danube region, one starts comparing the two strategies even though it is obvious the EUSBSR still gets more attention. This can of course be explained by the fact that the strategy remains the initial project. The comparative literature agrees upon the fact that differences between the strategies do exist and the EUSDR reduces weaknesses of the EUSBSR. Next to a stronger inclusion of non-EU countries, the second strategy shifts from a more top-down to a bottom-up approach by involving e the local level to a higher degree (Dühr, 2011; Gänzle & Kern, 2011).

Although the EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region and the Danube Strategy offer some insights about the macro regions itself (Dühr, 2011; Schymik, 2011; Wulf, 2012), the snowball effect with regard to the effects on other regions in and outside the European Union is rather untouched. The link to differentiated integration has been set but only investigated in a rather broad manner. Although Matarrelli (2012) analyzes the link according to relevant dimensions defined by Holzinger and Schimmelfennig (2012), the analyzes does not go into detail about possible side-effects. He mentions on the one hand the inclusion of non-EU countries but does not consider the different involved countries by strategy on the other. Even though Gänzle and Kern (2011) offer a good insight about the history of differentiated integration and how it regains attention among others with regard to the macro-regional strategies, they do not go further into detail how it can influence differences within the integration process of the European Union. Can the realization of MRS lead to a multi-speed Europe? Does the EU come closer together or does it even drive further apart?

This literature review shows in how far the topic of macro-regional strategies and differentiated integration has already been investigated. One can see that broad research has been undertaken trying to prove a linkage between these concepts but thereby leaving out important aspects. This leads to the following research questions to fill this gap:

To what extent can macro-regional strategies be regarded as a new form of differentiated integration?

To answer this question, the thesis applies the method of a comparative case study analysis. Three macro-regional strategies, namely the EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region, the Danube Region and the Adriatic-Ionian Region create the foundation for this analysis. Next to a general comparison of the case studies, an extra part of the thesis

is designed to investigate the special position of the external dimension. To answer the research question in a sufficient manner and to give the thesis a more structured approach, the following sub-research questions are posed:

1. What are macro regions and macro-regional strategies?
2. What do the three macro-regional strategies look like?
3. To what extent can the dimensions of differentiated integration be applied to the concept of macro-regional strategies?
4. What does the external dimension look like for each of the three cases?

The first chapter of the thesis covers the first two sub-questions which are solely about the concept of the macro regions and the macro-regional strategies. As the first one describes macro regions in a more general concept, the second question illustrates the three case studies on a more individual basis.

The second chapter deals with the theoretical part of this thesis. It does not only explain the theory of differentiated integration itself but also links it to the macro-regional strategies. The end of the theoretical part gives more reason for investigating the macro regions' external dimension and links it to the last sub-question. The third chapter elaborates the former relationships between the EU and the non-EU countries and looks into the role and responsibilities of third countries in the particular cases. The analytical conclusion links all of the parts together in order to sum-up sufficient answers to the main research question¹.

The next part gives a methodological insight how the thesis tries to answer the defined research questions and find filling material for the determined lack described in the literature review. The method of a comparative case study is presented and dimensions for the investigation of the case studies are offered.

¹ This master thesis has been conducted before the end of January 2014. This implies that the Ukrainian conflict of 2014 and the changes in the EU-Russia relation are not part of this thesis

2. METHODOLOGY

2.1 Introduction

With the purpose of answering the research question and analyzing the empirical data, this chapter elaborates on the methodological approach of this thesis and applies it to the relevant case studies. Before going into the methodological details of this thesis, it is relevant to figure out the difference between theory testing and theory consuming in social sciences. According to Esaiasson (2007), the method of theory testing places the theory into the focal point as with regard to the theory consuming method, the analysis is the centre of attention (Esaiasson, Gilljam, Oscarsson, & Wängnerud, 2007). In this case, the line between these two methods cannot be drawn that clearly. Although the research question positions the theory of differentiated integration in a central realm, the analysis of the different macro-regional strategies is linked to the theory and forms also a focal point of the research. Thus, this thesis has a close line between theory consuming and theory testing.

2.2 Explorative Research

With regard to the central research question and the whole set up of this thesis, one can frame it as an explorative research. An explorative research can be conducted by investigating a field or a particular problem that has not been clearly defined and looked at yet. An explorative research can also describe the situation that a certain problem formulation is actually not present. It often bases on the reviewing of secondary literature to acquire the new insights of an issue or to define a possible problem. According to Babbie (2001), the explorative research can be applied when possible problems are in a preliminary stage. It can be used when the issue at hand is rather new and data is complicated to find.

Having this theoretical background in mind, it is suitable to apply it to this particular research. Even though two macro-regional strategies have already been implemented and future strategies are being planned, the idea and especially the implementation process are rather new. At the moment, a strategy is rather regarded as a single case instead of considering impacts to the whole European Union (Dühr, 2011). With the

first two realized strategies, a lot of new ideas and initiatives for new strategies arose. This snowball effect could have an influence on the future of the European Union integration process. Whether this development can lead to a problem or even strengthen/weaken European integration by introducing alternative approaches has not been investigated yet and would underline the explorative idea. Explorative research which is also often related to the term of qualitative research is designed for small-n analysis. The thesis applies the explorative research tools of the ‘literature analysis’ and ‘case analyses’. These methods suit the research as the cases of the three macro-regional strategies are the central element for actually investigating the relation to differentiated integration. Owing to the fact that the idea of macro-regional strategies in the EU can still be regarded as rather new, the actual cases give the necessary foundation for this research. Additionally, with regard to the external dimension, a comparative case study analysis, as shown in the next part, is appropriate for this research approach as the different cases create an efficient foundation for describing the external dimension. To do so, the ‘literature analysis’ is a central element. It does not only offer the relevant scientific literature with regard to the theoretical framework but also the necessary insights about the EU relations with third countries. The following part intensifies the use of these methods and gives details on the case selection and the necessary utilization of materials.

2.3. Method: Comparative Case Study

This thesis is built on a qualitative case study methodology. A case study is defined as an empirical inquiry that investigates a current phenomenon within its real life context in particular when the boundaries between the phenomenon and the context cannot be regarded as clear or unambiguously. Case studies draw the operational link between certain sets of conditions, the causes and their effects and thereby clarify the techniques by which a set of relations has been established. According to Yin (2003), with the use of case studies the researcher would like to cover contextual conditions as they can be significant to the phenomenon under study, or the boundaries between the phenomenon and the context are not obvious and resolved. By applying a case-oriented research one can decide between a qualitative, comparative small-N analysis and a quantitative statistical large-N analysis. However, in the field of international relations, the small-N

analysis is mostly used as “interaction effects among many structural and agent-based variables, path dependencies, and strategic interaction among large numbers of actors across multiple levels of analysis with private information and strong incentives to bluff or deceive other actors” (Bennett & Elman, 2007, p. 171).

One can differentiate between two different case study designs: The Single versus the Multiple-Case Study Research. As the former one distinguishes between the phenomenon that is studied, the single case and its context, multiple case study design enables the researcher to investigate differences within and between cases. Due to the fact that the latter approach is used in the thesis, this part looks further into this method. If a study encloses more than one case, a multiple case study is required. This tactic provides the opportunity to do research and to analyze within and across settings. A holistic and embedded method can be applied. Even though this kind of study is known as being time consuming, it is a robust and reliable method in particular with regard to the different forms of validity. The so called Multiple Case Study Research Design (MCSRDR) states that evidence from more cases is more compelling and the number of cases can differ. The unit of analysis can vary from individuals, groups, departments, regions or nations. According to Miles and Huberman (1994) a case can be considered as “a phenomenon of some sort occurring in a bounded context. The case is in effect, your unit of analysis” (Miles & Huberman, 1994, p. 25). In this research, the concept of the macro-regional strategy can be considered as a single case but with an “embedded design” (Yin, 2003, p. 46) of a comparative analysis with the following three different EU macro-regional strategies:

- EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region
- EU Strategy for the Danube Region
- EU Strategy for the Adriatic-Ionian Region

Before going into detail about the case selection it is important to point out that all of the just mentioned strategies are at a different development status. As the first two strategies are already implemented, the EU strategy for the Adriatic-Ionian Region is still in its realization phase. To avoid an invalid research basis, only the initial and planning phase can be used for the comparative study as this phase can be found in every strategy.

With regard to the case selection, the thesis analyzes three out of the nine macro-regional strategies that have been described before. The first two strategies (EUSBSR and EUSDR) offer a good basis as they have been already officially implemented. The European Commission stated in the evaluation report of the two strategies that every new strategy is in the need of an added value. A new macro-regional strategy is an “approach only to be used in particular circumstances where involvement of the EU is appropriated, and existing EU horizontal policies reinforced” (European Commission, 2013e, p. 10). Even though different proposals have been made to design new macro-regional strategies, the European Council invited the Commission to outline a proposal for a new strategy for the Adriatic-Ionian Region till the end of 2014. Similar to the EUSBSR, the Adriatic Ionian macro-regional strategy has a Maritime Strategy for the Adriatic and Ionian Sea Basin as a key component to reinforce the establishment of an official strategy. As the next official strategy, the Adriatic-Ionian strategy is an interesting case for this research as despite its need to cover the same challenges as e.g. the ESBSR, it differs in the inclusion of non-EU countries: not only with regard to the number but also with regard to the geographical position. The strategy can also be named as a European Enlargement Policy Area, with Croatia as the new member states of the European Union, joined in July 2013.

Even though nine potential macro regions are in discussion, the choice of this case selection bases upon a solid foundation. These are the only strategies that are actually implemented or in a serious implementation phase. The other regions are ideas without any valid background to lean on. As the EUSBSR and the EUSDR are already officially implemented, the EUSAIR can be regarded as a stable new macro region as official documents have already been drawn and a deadline for the Action plan and the adoption of the strategy has been determined. None of the other strategies can offer this secure setting and an inclusion of another strategy would not provide the necessary background for a valid comparison.

To conduct a comparative case study with the selected three cases in a sufficient manner, the following aspects/dimensions are introduced which will be answered in every case to create an adequate level for the analyses.

Each part of the strategy begins with the simple approach by answering the question:

1. Why is the macro-regional strategy in question necessary?

This facet serves as an introduction to the respective strategies. It includes basic data about the challenges the region has to cope with, geographical data and areas which can be strengthened by the strategy. To what extent are the involved states actually interested in the MRS? Are they only taking part due to geographical reasons? It is supposed to give an overview about the necessity for the establishment of the macro region.

2. Which actors initiated and pushed for the strategy?

This question also handles parts of the governance structure of the strategies. Is the particular strategy initiated by EU institutions, Member States, Regions or other stakeholders e.g. NGOs? Is a bottom-up or a top-down approach favored? Even though it would be favorable to already include the implementation procedure of the EUSBSR and the EUSDR, this procedural method has to be handled carefully, keeping in mind that not all strategies have already reached the implementation procedure.

3. To what extent are third-countries included in the macro-regional strategy?

Next to a simple yes and no answer it is relevant to investigate in how far possible non-EU countries are involved. Do they have special responsibilities like priority areas? What are the (former) relations to the EU? Are there possible new member states involved? Are the countries related to the ENP? Due to the fact that this thesis contains an own chapter focusing on the external dimension of the macro-regional strategies, this dimension serves more as an introduction to the topic.

4. What kind of cooperation has already existed before the planning of the MRS?

This question can be linked to the subsequent one. It focuses on former EU programs or initiatives like the Council of the Baltic Sea States (CBSS) or the Northern Dimension (ND).

To give it a more compact overview, the case studies have a look at the necessity of the macro-regional strategies, the governance structure, important initiators, pre-established cooperation structures and the external dimension.

2.4 Materials

Even though the idea of EU macro-regional strategies is rather new, the first two implemented strategies can already give some basic grounds for the research as is shown in the part of the literature review. Academic literature with regard to the future strategies is rather limited and the strategies are most of the time only named without any further clarifications. Therefore, to find a valid foundation for the analysis of all strategies, the thesis uses official documents from the different strategies like Communications, Action Plans, presentations and meeting protocols. This data is used to take into account the general description of the macro-regional strategy as well as the specific and chosen strategies in the case study analysis. The policy documents are exploited for a strategic description of the problem at hand and can serve as a source of data. The academic literature is applied for elaborating on the concepts and to outline the theoretical framework.

2.5. Limitations of the Thesis

Though the topic of macro-regional strategies can be regarded as quite new and is in the beginning stage of intensive investigations, limitations have to be drawn and agreed upon to focus on the research aim and limit the threat of being influenced by too many third variables.

The predominant limitation can be observed in the case selection of this research. Out of nine possible macro regions, only three have been chosen to guarantee certain degree of scientific validity. As the EUSBSR and the EUSDR are already implemented, they create a sufficient basis for the case selection as they passed through the same development stages. The inclusion of the EUSAIR can be regarded as more critical as it is not officially implemented yet and is still in the planning stage. However, the inclusion of this strategy seems reasonable as the information available is sufficient enough to set up a comparative case study analysis. The three chosen cases could only be included in the analysis as the other planned macro regions are still at a very vague level without having any official documents to back up their developments. The inclusion of more macro regions would focus more on an unpredictable and previsible outcome.

Though the thesis mentions the funding situation with regard to the governance structure and also as a broad fact to underline some facts, the thesis does not include it as an own subject. The analysis of the single member state's financial structures would need to be investigated and as the thesis does not focus intensively upon single states of the macro regions, the funding structure is limited.

3. MACRO REGIONS AND MACRO-REGIONAL STRATEGIES

3.1 Introduction: The Challenging Way of Defining Macro Regions

The concept of macro regions and their strategies form an important part of this thesis and are therefore in the need of a narrow description to understand the idea behind this possible new form of European integration. This part serves as a sufficient starting point to answer the first sub-question of this master thesis *“what are macro regions/ macro-regional strategies?”*.

The macro region is a rather new idea and is still in the process of finding a commonly agreed definition. Moreover, official literature about this topic is rather low. Even though the EUSBSR as well as the EUSDR are the first officially implemented macro-regional strategies in the European Union, a common definition of macro regions and macro-regional strategies has not been established yet. Thus, this part would like to conceptualize macro regions and macro-regional strategies and highlights common characteristics of this concept. It starts with a more theoretical part which formulates the necessary foundation of macro regions.

3.2 Old and New Regionalism – the Changes of Regionalism and the Establishment of Macro Regions

Before the EU applied the concept of macro regions, it was originally used in the fields of International Relations (IR) and has been related to the concept of regionalism, in particular of ‘old regionalism’. Different theoretical approaches do exist with regard to regionalism.² It is common to make a distinction between the old and new form of regionalism (Hettne, 1999). As this section shows, the development from old to new regionalism is a relevant process and an explanation for the new establishment of EU macro regions.

Old regionalism elucidates regional integration from a security oriented point of view with the focus on sovereign states. For a region, the state is central and the top-down

² See Scully and Jones (2010) for a detailed overview of regionalism in the contemporary Europe. An up-to-date analysis of regionalism is given and regions and regionalism are in particularly described after the central enlargement rounds of the EU.

approach is fundamental with the aim of a unilateral economic integration (De Lombaerde, 2010). The European Coal and Steel Community in 1950 is a good example of old regionalism (Hettne, 1999). The state has the task to maximize its gains and the region acts as an alliance to limit external political pressure. The region itself operates therefore as geo-political actor. In this scenario, regionalism describes a situation in which the region is observed from the outside (Fawcett & Hurrell, 1995). The IR type of macro regionalism changed especially during the twentieth century and the end of the cold war. This phase also amended the European integration process and a shift from a pure economic focus to a more political one could be observed (Joffé, 2007). The new period of regionalism offers another focus on political and multidimensional procedures and takes place simultaneously at different levels of the European Union which can also be matched to the construction of macro regions. The appearance of new actors is an important aspect of new regionalism which also decreases the dominant position of sovereign states (Telò, 2007). A change within the economic integration could also be noticed and due to the multidimensional approach and the inclusion of new actors, a more independent economy came into being. This was also the beginning of the so called `bottom up` approach which shows a new form of European integration with the acceptance of sub-national actors. According to De Lombaerde (2010), macro-regional cooperation can be regarded as a form of “new regionalism” with the inclusion of new actors and a limitation of the top-down approach (De Lombaerde, F. Söderbaum, L. Van Langenhove, & Baert, 2010).

The contrast between old and new regionalism has been explained by Wallis (2002) who especially highlights that the new form of regionalism is not necessarily an improved or higher level compared to the old version. He argues that the old one has not been designed to current problems which are taken over by the new form and portrays the new form of regionalism goal and network oriented with the involvement of new actors. It is a very process oriented and open approach with flexible borders and a diffusion of power. In contrast, old regionalism is more structure oriented and concentrates on new regional structures. The defined borders and jurisdictions are rather rigid and the concentration of power lies within the sovereignty of the state. However, both types of regionalism can be applied to the European Union as the Union itself can be described as a form of old regionalism with regard to the above mentioned characteristics (Wallis, 2002).

3.3 Identifying Macro Regions – A Long Way to an Unstable Definition

Despite the fact that one could categorize macro regions partly within the changes and process of ‘old’ and ‘new regionalism’, a clear explanation of the concept is still missing. As already discussed, a standard definition of macro regions does not exist even though it has already been applied to different concepts. On the one hand it describes a global group of nations like e.g. the EU or the Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN) and on the other hand a cluster of administrative regions within a country like in Australia, Germany or Romania (Samecki, 2009). The obvious aspect shows that a macro region can be regarded as the opposite of a micro region and includes therefore communities and regions not only from one country but several ones. Hence, different countries are included.

With the development of the EUSBSR, the European Commission defines macro regions as “an area spreading including territory from a number of different countries or regions associated with one or more common features or challenges [...] of a geographical, cultural, economic or other nature” (Samecki, 2009, p. 1). Although this vague definition does not carry any implication of scale, in an EU context one can filter that a macro region consists of a number of regions in a variety of countries. According to Samecki (2009), central characteristics of the concept are functionality and flexibility. The macro-regional strategies base therefore on common challenges and transnational possibilities that are in need of collective action. This definition has also a territorial dimension which assumes that a number of regions and nation states are involved in cross-border cooperation. The Committee of the Regions (2011) adds that the strategies can be regarded as a new type of territorial cooperation at the interregional as well as the transnational level.

The DG Regio expands the definition by arguing that the enlargement of a macro region does not have to imply the same administrative boundaries of a nation state but can only cover certain parts of the state (European Commission, 2012b). With regard to the functional dimension of the concept the idea of a macro region bases always on a natural or landscape system like the Baltic Sea and the Danube River (Braun & Kovács, 2011). Territorial linkages as well as economic and social connections are existent between the shared ecosystems. DG Regio also stated that the boundaries of macro regions are rather flexible and subject to the problem addressed. Thus “only a multifunctional approach, that is, a combination of different topics, makes according to

the DG Regio a European Region a macro-region for which it is useful to develop an integrated strategy” (Dühr, 2011, p. 7). A clear link to the ideas of new regionalism is obvious, especially with regard to the flexibility aspect.

Although macro regions preserve a consistency due to common characteristics or even challenges, defining the limitations of a region is not necessary. Keeping in mind the standards of place based policy in functional reasons one can point out that the actual boundaries can vary and adopt according to the weight and significance of the policy area in question. Therefore, it can occur that functional regions will overlap and a given location can exist in more than one region (Schymik, 2011).

3.4 Macro-Regional Strategies

Every macro region is in need of a jointly agreed strategy to overcome common challenges. The Committee of the Regions portrays macro-regional strategies as a new type of “territorial cooperation at the interregional and transnational level to meet the European objectives defined in the 2020 strategy, cohesion policy, the integrated maritime policy and external cooperation policies” (CPMR General Secretariat, 2012, p. 2). The aim is to reinforce the role of territorial authorities and the multi-level governance approach. As with the concept of macro regions, a commonly agreed definition of macro-regional strategies does not exist. For the macro-regional strategy of the EUSBSR, the Commission states that a strategy is “an integrated framework that allows the European Union and Member States to identify needs and allocate available resources thus enabling the Baltic Sea Region to enjoy a sustainable environment and optimal economic and social development” (Samecki, 2009, p. 2). This way of formulating macro-regional strategies features the concept of integration as well as facilitation. It imposes that all important policy areas are included and that the individual strategies should facilitate different possibilities of improving them. It is necessary to emphasize on the fact that the strategies do not have the power of imposing anything.

The idea and objectives behind the strategies can differ in every new macro region because every region has different needs and problems. However, for every macro region it is common that additional interventions by the European Union, regional or national authorities or third parties occur to reinforce the functioning of a macro region.

The most obvious approach of a macro region is the attempt of trying to resolve issues in a smaller group of countries and regions, compared to the 28 countries of the current European Union. This can lead to a stronger and more effective cohesion at the EU level and the cooperation in certain areas can result in a better outcome which would not be possible in an individual approach (Dubois, Hedin, Schmitt, & Sterling, 2009). Environmental challenges are a good example to explain this phenomenon. On the one hand, environmental issues need to be addressed by more actors and levels to handle it sufficiently as environmental problems do not stop at the border. Countries and regions have to work together to solve these challenges. On the other hand, the situation can occur that some actors are not interested and motivated in solving particular problems. To overcome this deadlock, it is relevant to frame in this case the environmental issues in a broader way and to highlight possible economic and social benefits.

Another type of macro region exists that does not base upon common challenges to set up a macro-regional strategy. This kind of macro region is asked by different regions and member state to establish a joint strategy to be better prepared to compete in the common marketplace with the upholding of e.g. social and environmental standards: “In particular the new and innovative integrated way of working across a wide number of sectors may offer significant opportunities for specialization, cooperation and greater efficiencies (for example through networking)” (Samecki, 2009, p. 2).

By the creation of a macro-regional strategy it is of significance that a strategy does not cover up already existing competences of institutions in the particular area. The establishment of macro-regional strategies is in need of certain prerequisites. It is stated that the geographical needs are in line with the EU 2020 goals but should not support the ‘one size fits all’ programs under territorial cooperation. A valid and authentic model for each strategy is based upon the partnership rule and an obvious political commitment to get to the macro-regional objectives of the strategies together (CPMR General Secretariat, 2012).

Macro-regional strategies can support the territorial dimension of EU policies as well as promoting the collective action of public and private actors in fields like infrastructure and environmental policy. Overall, the strategies can strengthen the implementation process of EU level programs like EUROPE 2020 at the regional level. Therefore “macro-regional strategies can be interpreted as measures to combat the EU financial and economic crisis by proposing better mechanism for the comprehensive coordination of scarce budgetary resources” (Kern & Gänzle, 2013a, p. 3). They can also push non-

EU countries to subscribe to EU legislation which will be particularly visible in the case study of the EUSAIR.

3.4.1 A Geographical Scope

The two already implemented macro-regions as well as future strategies show very clearly that the size of included states and regions vary to a very high extent not only in the total number of included territories but also the number of participating EU and non-EU countries show a discrepancy (Table 1). The number of included states also highlights the differences in the actual territorial sizes. One can conclude that the boundaries of a macro-region are not set due to a limitation of included states or a territorial size but rather identified by common opportunities and problems. The Baltic Sea Region and the Danube Region are also good examples to show that macro regions can be characterized by geographical features like sea, rivers, lakes or mountains. The Committee of the Regions terms in the Spacca Report that a macro region is “a functional zone [...] with no pre-established borders and its definition is closely linked to the quality and number of joint problems that will be considered” (CPMR General Secretariat, 2012, p. 3). Hence, macro regions can be considered flexible and are related to the functional geographical limits of the respective common problems.

3.4.2 Governance

While no common and predefined governance strategy exists and every macro-regional strategy has an individual approach of carrying out the strategies, they have to oblige rules that have been set by the Commission: the governing principles of the already established and future strategies follow a simple approach of the ‘three No’s’. The first ‘No’ states that a strategy has to be implemented and realized by already existing organizations in the particular area and the establishment of new institutions is not allowed. The policy advisor at the Directorate General for Regional Policy of David Sweet states that “the European Commission cannot and does not want to manage the strategy directly, as we do not have sufficient resources and local knowledge. We need to rely on a governance model involving institutions and organizations from the participating regions, who know how things can be done best” (Malvani, 2011, p. 4). However, this does not imply the non-existence of a governance structure. The Priority

Area Coordinators (PACs) are responsible for the cooperation in the specific macro region and have the necessary expertise to assist projects within the macro region and monitors the implementation processes which are reported back to the Commission.

The second “No” describes the situation that macro-regional strategies are not based on new established legislations. The strategies have taken over the form of a Commission`s Communication which is approved by the European Council. The involved member states can decide whether they want to implement these communications with no binding regulations. The idea behind this ‘no legislation’ tactic is to improve the already existing policies and to reinforce the cooperation between different sectors in different countries or regions (Schymik, 2011).

The last “No” states that no extra funding for the macro-regional strategies can be allocated. The concept behind this focuses on the need to align existing funding to the common projects and actions. This should lead to a better alignment of funding from certain sources like the EU, regional, national or local sources. The concept of ‘Alignment of Funding’ is a new approach of the macro-regional strategies in the EU and asks for a combined overview of necessary funding for common projects and initiatives. This kind of funding strengthens the cooperation between the involved actors and the coordination and prioritization of all programs despite their EU, national or regional nature (Dühr, 2011).

This “No” structure, especially with regard to no new institutions motivates the macro regions and the involved states and regions to obtain support from already existing cooperation structures on the intergovernmental as well as interregional level (CPMR General Secretariat, 2012).

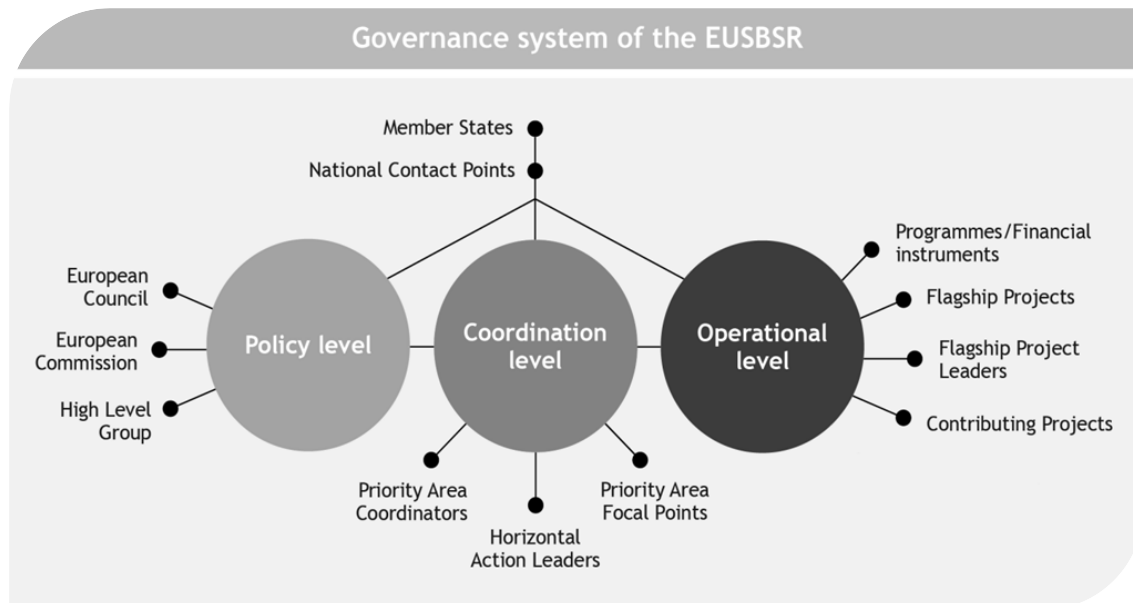
Having this structure in mind one can sum up that, next to the European Commission, the member states are generally the initiators of a macro-regional strategy. They are in charge of setting up the strategic actions and are responsible for implementing and coordinating these actions within their planned and defined territory, also known as National Contact Points. The Commission is accountable for the supervision, coordination as well as the follow-up procedure. Moreover, the institution is held responsible for passing around necessary information and supports the application procedure of the macro-regional strategies. “Working in partnerships with interested parties in the Region, it drafts regular progress reports and uses its power of initiative to table proposals aimed at adapting the strategy and action plan if necessary” (CPMR

General Secretariat, 2012, p. 4). This particular coordination also implies an investigation of the application of funds in realizing the strategic priorities.

An obvious aspect of the governance structure of the strategies is the small involvement of regions in the initial phase of the first implemented strategies. This underlines the top-down approach as sub-national authorities were rather excluded. To encourage the Multi-level Governance approach of macro regions, the Commission initiated widespread consultation processes in terms of forums at which all interested actors have the possibility to take part. Nevertheless, in spite of these efforts, an unbalanced governance structure is still existent due to the limited involvement of regional authorities, NGOs and private partners (Stocchiero, 2010). As already described, macro-regionalization goes beyond EU borders. However, the MLG approach is not limited to member states only and is even intertwined with EU enlargement and the European Neighborhood Policy. It can also be linked to programs like the Northern Dimension (Archer & Etzold, 2008; Kern & Gänzle, 2013a).

The macro-regional strategies seem to add a new level to the MLG structure. The level lies between the EU and the individual member states. It is transnational, open to the participation of sub-national authorities and a balance between the different levels. This transnational level responds to a very high extent to the geographical and natural areas (sea, river, mountains). This governance structure can also be specified as a “soft space” which offers a flexible and multi-level institution organization, the “soft institution” (Stocchiero, 2013, p. 15). This new governance form can according to Zielonka (2006) be categorized as multi-centered, -leveled and transnational with so called “soft borders” (Zielonka, 2006, p. 144). Thus, the strategy of a macro region is capable to link spatial diversity to the construction of the European Union. Due to different consultation processes different actors have the possibility to actively participate in identifying priorities of the Action Plans.

Owing to the fact that the governance structure of a macro-regional strategy implies several layers as well as actors, the following graphic tries to offer an overview of the governance structure.



Graphic 2: Governance System of the EUSBSR (EUSBSR, 2012)

As visible in Graphic 2, the Commission's task is to fulfill its leading role of the strategic coordination of a macro-regional strategy. It has to link the strategies to significant policy initiatives and has to encourage the involvement of various stakeholders. The Commission is responsible for assisting the implementation of the strategy in cooperation with the relevant member states as well as non-EU states. The institution has an evaluating and reporting position and can review the strategy and the Action Plan if necessary. This procedure has to be in discussion with the Priority Area Coordinators, the Horizontal Action Leaders (HALs) and the National Contact Points (NCPs). The proposed changes need the support of the Council or a High-Level Group. The High-Level Group has an advisory function with regard to the implementation process of a strategy. It can also suggest new actions to encourage the macro-regional approach in setting up new policies and arranging financial instruments (Kern & Gänzle, 2013a).

The single member states (non-EU states included) have to make sure that the strategies are implemented in a satisfactory manner and are linked to a permanent political commitment. It is also relevant that they strengthen the link to already existing and future EU policies. The state, the national administration, has to guarantee national and strategic planning and has to make certain that policies and financial instruments are in accordance with the strategy. The member states have the possibility to align the National Contact Point. The NCP tries to seek political support for realizing the strategy

and strengthening the transnational cooperation by exchanging best practices with other NCPs. It has a central networking role and has to make the involvement of central stakeholders possible. It has to remain an ongoing policy dialogue with programs, financial instruments and national stakeholders to arrange the resources. On the Commission's demand, they also take over monitoring and reporting positions (EUSBSR, 2012).

The Priority Area Coordinators and Horizontal Action leaders take over the facilitation of a general stakeholder involvement and cooperation for the whole macro region. They have the responsibility for an effective realization of the Priority Areas and the Horizontal Actions as well as reviewing the relevance as defined in the Action Plan. According to the reviewing of the results, they suggest changes, amendments or even a removal of actions. The Flagship Project Leader (FPL) is responsible for an effective execution of the Flagship Project but is also in a steady interaction with the PACs and HALs. The FPL takes part in their conferences and meetings and reports to the PACs and HALs on the progress of the projects. The FPL has also the task to launch and uphold cooperation with other FPLs to guarantee consistency and stay away from possible duplications of work (EUSBSR, 2012; Kern & Gänzle, 2013b).

3.5 Conclusion

The already established macro-regional strategies have not only been realized to fulfill the objectives of territorial cohesion, they serve as pilot projects for the whole European Union in terms of regionalism and transnationalism. The Baltic Sea and Danube Region have been an experiment of macro regional policy. A macro region itself can be seen as a greater region within the Union, consistent of a number of states aiming to fulfill common goals. The specific region can be defined in terms of function and territory and is regarded as quite inventive and pioneering. This reputation results out of the fact that cooperation within a macro region is on a transnational level and goes beyond the usual framework of sub national regional policy. Macro regions also open up the opportunity to strengthen cooperation between various actors of different EU levels. Even though it is argued that the existence of macro regions can be explained with new regionalism, the first two realized strategies are an example to illustrate that macro regions cannot be categorized solely under the scope of new regionalism. While the flexibility and the

inclusion of different actors are given, the two strategies followed an obvious top-down approach with the main power being shared by the Commission and the nation states. A governance change is in process but a clear distinction between the two parts of regionalism is not possible. With regard to the already integrated macro-regional strategies it can be shown that a new policy level becomes apparent which can be found between the national and the supranational level. Finally one can state that the idea of a macro region is still developing and due to the discrepancies between the different macro regions, common characteristics or even a common definition are rather difficult to define. However, one can argue that the European Union has reached a point in which the Union splits up in smaller parts to deal with certain matters in different ways. The following part applies the methodological technique of a comparative case study and investigates the macro regions with a more practical approach. The analysis starts with the macro-regional strategy of the EUSBSR, followed by the EUSDR and EUSAIR.

4. CASE STUDY ANALYSIS

4.1 Introduction: The Macro-Regional Fever – The Boom of Macro-Regional Strategies

The Treaty of Lisbon has been entered into force in 2009 and brought along central changes to the governance structure of the Regional and Cohesion Policy. The focus is on the reinforcement of the cooperation and the coherence within the European Union, especially on the territorial cohesion (Faludi, 2010). The Union's spatial policy has now the possibility to form and determine new instruments for its territory in terms of achieving a well balanced regional development (Ahner & Fuechtner, 2010). The Treaty of Lisbon included the territorial cohesion as part of primary law for the first time in the history of the European Union. Article three of the Treaty states that the European Union has the responsibility to “promote economic, social and territorial cohesion, and solidarity among Member States”. The Union and the member states have according to Article 4 of the Consolidated Version of the Treaty of the European Union shared competences. The spatial planning of the European Union has therefore another background with new determined targets. The concept of macro-regional strategies can be regarded as one of the new objective of the territorial cohesion project. The new status of macro-regional strategies is rather contented. Dühr (2011) argues for example that even although macro-regional strategies are handled as the new form to promote territorial cohesion, the transnational cooperation cannot be considered as a total new form in the EU. Clusters of nation-states like the Baltic Sea States or the Visegard Group do exist since the beginning of 90s and EU institutions have supported these cooperations, even with EU funding just available since 1997.

Going back to the introductory part of this thesis, the Benelux Union can also be considered as a forerunner of the transnational cooperation, also with new current cross-border cooperations with the German region of North-Rhine Westphalia (Groß, 2004). However, with the implementation of the EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea region as first macro-regional strategy a “macro-regional fever” in Europe arose (Conference of Peripheral Maritime Regions of Europe, 2010, p. 1). The territorial dimension of the EU Cohesion Policy which has also been determined in the Europe 2020 strategy could also be a reason for the increasing fever. The strengthening of territorial cohesion is a focal point by the Treaty of Lisbon and the Europe 2020 strategy to reinforce the European

Integration Process. The developments of the macro-regional strategies have to be linked to these changes in the EU policy framework.

Even though more macro-regional strategies are in discussion, only the EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region and the European Danube Strategy have been officially implemented. They serve as pilot cases for becoming a “model for regional cooperation” (European Commission, 2009, p. 2). This part gives a detailed description of the three chosen case studies by describing them on the basis of the predefined dimensions. They try to give an answer to the sub-research question: **What are the three macro-regional strategies look like?** Owing to the chronological fact, the part starts with the EU Strategy of the Baltic Sea Region, followed by the EU Strategy for the Danube Region and ends with the newest strategy, the EU Strategy for the Adriatic-Ionian Region.

4.2 Starting the Fever: The EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region (EUSBSR)

In 2009, the EU launched its first macro-regional strategy, the EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region (EUSBSR). Johannes Hahn, the EU Commissioner for Regional Policy argues that the first macro-regional strategy has been designed to operate as a “new model for co-operation” as well as to “inspire other regions” (Hahn, 2010, p. 4). The question that arises is why this particular region is suitable for the creation of the first macro-regional strategy and why it is actually necessary to set up a macro region in this territory.

The most obvious geographical element of the region is the Baltic Sea. The countries which are bordering this Sea have always been known as intensive trading partners. After the EU enlargement of 2004, eight³ out of the nine Baltic countries are members of the EU. These countries are located at 8,000 km of the Baltic Sea coastline which they share with Russia, the only non-EU country in this strategy (Esko, 2009).

The macro region cannot only be characterized by its high number of states that are involved but also by the balance and symmetry between these states. Six states have a population between 1.3 and 8.9 million which can be characterized as the EU smaller states. The two big states with Germany (82 million) and Poland (38million) can be partly limited to the most involved federal states as Mecklenburg Vorpommern,

³ Sweden, Denmark, Finland, Germany, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania and Poland

Schleswig-Holstein and Hamburg (approx. 6.3 million inhabitants). In the case of Poland, the coastal territories of Western Pomerania, Pomerania and Warmia-Masuria are most involved and have a total of 5.3 million inhabitants. In the big picture one can argue that the cooperation area of the Baltic Sea is symmetric. “The structural symmetric within the Baltic Sea [...] region proves to be beneficial in terms of macro-regional aspects. The states [...] have an equal incentive to raise their stature and influence within the European and global community through transnational cooperation” (Schymik, 2011, p. 26).

Taking a look at the composition of the involved member states of the EUSBSR, one can point out that the region covers and links ‘young’ member states with quite wealthy states like Denmark and Finland of the Northern Dimension as well as the ‘old’ states of the EU, such as Denmark and Germany. It is not only a combination between old and new member states but also a geographical connection between the periphery and the centre of the EU territory. The strategy of the Baltic Sea Region can also be considered to support the territorial cohesion of the expanded union (Braun & Kovács, 2011). Another geographical aspect of the EUSBSR is that it lies mostly in the EU territory. Eight out of the nine coastal states belong to the European Union. Despite Russia being the only exclusion, one can argue that the EUSBSR is predominantly an internal EU strategy.

This territory does have potentials like a well-educated workforce or highly knowledge-based industries. However, the area has to face many challenges, especially with regard to the Baltic Sea: the quality of the sea decreases on a yearly basis as the pollution levels increase consistently. The fish stocks are declining and the biodiversity of the Baltic Sea BEING threatened (Larsen, 2008). Next to the environmental problems, the region has to handle the poor infrastructure and transport possibilities as well as the hindrance to trade and energy supply. The first macro-regional strategy has been set up to face these challenges and it will “help to eradicate the unequal legacy of the part when huge economic, social and infrastructure disparities developed between countries artificially separated by decades by the Iron Curtain” (Hahn, 2010, p. 4). The special position of the region serving as a pilot project with regard to the macro-regional strategies bases also upon the necessity to reinforce coordination not only between the involved countries but also between already established institutions which could not handle the challenges in an efficient manner.

Since the 1990, the countries that are situated around the Baltic Sea are known for their transnational cooperation, mostly known as the political forum of the CBSS or the Helsinki Commission (HELCOM) that influences policy- and decision making processes. With this long background of transnational cooperation, the question arises why the EU institutions took the initiatives to become part of this cooperation scheme. The main argument roots in the recognition that the intergovernmental cooperation is ineffective by coordinating sector policies across different levels of government and especially across national borders. The establishment of the EUSBSR with the involvement of the EU was supposed to resolve this deadlock (Dühr, 2011).

According to Etzold and Gänzle (2011) the high number of organizations that has been established to deal with the East-West disparities tries to cover such an artificial number of institutional cooperation objectives that it got the reputation of an ‘institutional nightmare’ (T. Etzold & Gänzle, 2011, p. 2). Although many objectives and goals have been defined and started, the Baltic Sea has to cope with the same challenges as it had approximately 20 years ago as well. This can be explained by the problematic coordination framework as well as institutional and policies overlap. The EUSBSR is therefore situated on shaky grounds as it is not only set-up for resolving common challenges but also to operate and amend with already long-existing institutions. While this can offer a good basis, it can also slow-down the process of applying new structures and working procedures.

A Euro-Baltic Intergroup, consisting of MEPs from the member states of the Baltic Sea Region used this background for presenting the initial idea of the strategy to the Commission’s president, José Manuel Barroso, in 2005. The preliminary strategy had the idea to reinforce the potential of the reunited Baltic Sea Region as well as lobbying for a consolidated EU within the Northern Dimension. In 2007, after a mandate of the European Council, the European Commission resumed the initiative but limited the external dimension of the European Parliament’s proposal. In August 2008 and half a year later, a public consultation process took place with a variety of regional stakeholders. “The European Commission has been able to draft an Action Plan that captures the essence of the public opinion in the region” (Schymik & Krumrey, 2009, p. 15). The EUSBSR came together with an Action Plan which promoted the creation of four pillars with the following goals:

- Enhancement of the environmental state of the Baltic Sea
- Promotion of a more balanced economy
- Increased accession and attractiveness of the region
- Reinforcement of safety and security

These pillars are split up into fifteen Priority Areas (PAs) and are assigned to the so-called flagship projects. In 2013, the initial four pillars have been limited to three as the amount of priority areas increased from 15 to 17. Even though it has been the goal to set up a more defined and structured strategy, it is “doubtful whether the Strategy will in practice become more focused and more effective” (T Etzold, 2013, p. 11).

With the revised Action Plan in 2013, the Strategy focuses now on the following three main areas:

- Environmental protection (“Save the Sea”)
- Economic development (“Increase prosperity”)
- Improvement of the infrastructure (“Connect the Region”)

These three main objectives are connected to the amended 17 priority areas and five horizontal actions which are shown in more detail in Table 2. The table offers also a good overview of the responsibility areas of the involved states and organizations. The Council of the Baltic Sea states, the Helsinki Commission (HELCOM) and Vision and Strategies around the Baltic Sea (VASAP) are allocated to different priority areas and Horizontal Actions. The Priority Action Coordinators (PACs) is accountable for one priority area in which the PAC facilitates new ideas and supports the implementation and realization of the structural policy in the EUSBSR together with the HALs. The Coordinators can consist of managers from the participating states or the involved organizations (Dubois et al., 2009). Having a look at Table 2, the second column shows which countries and organizations are allocated to the respective priority areas. An obvious aspect is that only members of the European Union or organizations are assigned but Russia as a non-EU country can only act via the involved organization they are part of. It is also surprisingly to see that the new member states of the European Union are hardly involved in the implementation of the strategy although they are supposed to have strongest interest in its results.

Priority Area	Countries in Charge
“Save the Sea”	
P1 Strengthening sustainability of agriculture and fisheries	Finland, Lithuania, Sweden
P2 Preserving biodiversity (+ fisheries)	Germany
P3 Decreasing of the use of hazardous substances	Sweden
P4 Decreasing nutrients input to the Sea	Finland, Poland
P5 Becoming a leading region in maritime safety	Denmark, Finland
P6 Security (protection from emergencies on land)	Sweden, CBSS
P7 Becoming a region model (clean shipping)	Denmark
“Increase Prosperity”	
P8 Crime (cross-border crime)	Finland, Lithuania
P9 Energy (Improving energy access/markets)	Denmark, Latvia
P10 Transport (Improving transport links)	Sweden, Lithuania
“Connect the Region”	
P11 Culture (Promotion of common culture and identity)	Schleswig-Holstein (Germany), Poland
P12 Education (innovative Education)	Hamburg (Germany), Norden Ass (Sweden)
P13 Health	Northern Dimension Partnership in Public Health and Social Well being
P14 Innovation (Research & Innovation)	Sweden, Poland
P15 Internal Market (Reduction of barriers)	Estonia
P16 Small and Medium Enterprises (Promotion of enterprises)	Denmark
P17 Tourism (Cohesiveness through tourism)	Mecklenburg-Vorpommern (Germany)

Table 2: EUSBSR: Priority Areas and Countries in Charge

While the European Parliament can be considered as the pioneer of the Baltic Sea Strategy, even of the macro-regional strategies in general, the leadership of this idea was taken over by the Commission and in particular by the DG Regio. This commitment can be explained by the Commission's attempt to revitalize the EU regional policy. The strategy should be used to repair the regional aid deficits and to reinforce territorial cohesion that has been a central aspect of the Lisbon Treaty. Next to the Commission the member states have developed into an additional driving force of the macro-regional idea of the EUSBSR. Despite the initial thoughts and hopes of the European Parliament, Finland and Germany did not take their positions during their Council presidency in 2006 and 2007 to take up the initiative to support the process. In 2009, the Swedish government used its term in the EU Council to substantiate the first macro-regional strategy. From 2008 onwards, the involved actors were asked to rethink or start thinking about their regional cooperation as little has been done in this area before. Poland could be seen as a very motivated actor which promoted intensively the strategy idea across all state and societal levels. Despite the fact that Finland and Germany hesitated to take up the initiatives for the EUSBSR, the strategy can benefit from the presidency rotation procedure of the European Council. Lithuania announced in its presidency of the second half of 2013 to formulate the EUSBSR as one of its main objectives. Particular attention has been given to "the coordination and synergy of respective EU policies, aiming at better results in various policy fields, by encouraging the growth of regional economies, and by creating further impetus for the increased competitiveness of the EU internal market as well as by improving the environmental situation" (Lithuanian Presidency of the Council of the EU, 2013b, p. 9). In 2015, Latvia is going to take over the presidency which could also strengthen the MRS and the general idea of macro regions in the European Union.

Next to the EU member states, the European Commission has a central role in the implementation and monitoring of the EUSBSR. The member states of the Baltic Sea Region (BSR) and the Commission can be considered the prime mover of the policy process. The Commission "assumes an important role in preparing strategy reviews, monitoring its implementation and leading the overall coordination of the rolling Action Plan" (Kern & Gänzle, 2013b, p. 6). The involved states take action in the policy formulation in the so-called High Level Group (HLG). This group is not solely reserved for the participating states but also for all EU member states. However, experience shows that only the member states of the particular macro-regions take part. It can be

assumed that with an increase of macro-regional strategies across the European Union, the number of participants would be rising.

Even though one of the three “No’s” clearly defines that macro-regional strategies are not in the position to establish new institutions, the EUSBSR show that MRS do have the position to influence and change already existing institutions as well as motivating new kinds of institutional interplay. As the institutions are already operating at the macro-regional level, a strong cooperation with the EUSBSR seems to be quite relevant for the realization of the priority areas and the flagship projects. This governance approach can be linked to the Committee of the Region’s ‘White Paper on Multilevel Governance’ which also focuses on the interplay between different government structures. The Committee of the Regions states that “the coordinated action of the various levels of government, on the one hand, and the coordination of policies and instruments, on the other hand, are vital to improve European governance and the implementation of Community strategies” (Committee of the Regions, 2009 p. 21).

For an effective realization of the EUSBSR, the most relevant organizations to connect with are the CBSS and HELCOM. These organizations are particularly relevant for the marine governance as well as strengthening the Commission’s position. Although the EU joined the Helsinki Convention in 1992 and the CBSS, the position could be regarded as quite marginal (Browning & Joenniemi, 2004). With the realization of the EUSBSR, the Commission could gain decision-making power in addition to a strong position in the monitoring procedure.

But not only the Commission could improve its status within this territory, the EUSBSR tries to strengthen its bottom-up approach by including more regional actors and to benefit from their more practical experiences. The EU Council pointed out in 2011 that the “synergy effects between the EUSBSR and multilateral cooperation structures and networks within the Baltic Sea Region [...] through better co-ordination and effective use of communication channels and for a related to EUSBSR and Baltic Sea Region to provide increased efficiency of intervention within macro region” (European Council, 2011c, p. 5).

Macro-regional strategies have the opportunity to offer new political possibilities to sub-national authorities and the civil society. With the establishment of transnational networks they can achieve a broader influence within the EUSBSR. According to Kern (2001), these transnational cooperations cannot only serve for an exchange of expertise; they also form a sufficient basis for lobbying and the organization of further funding

possibilities. The Union of the Baltic Cities (UBC) and the Baltic Metropolis Network are two examples of these transnational cooperations which had and still have a strong influence on the realization of the EUSBSR (Kern, 2001). The sub-national government of Mecklenburg-Vorpommern is even solely responsible for the priority area of tourism. In the case of the EUSBSR, the strategy amends transnationalization by including the civil society like NGOs. The BSR could therefore develop into a strong territory of cross-border cooperation and transnational networking. Maybe being quite progressive and forward-looking, it still seems to be more appearance than reality. Only a few local representatives could be found as members of steering groups and even coordinators of the priority areas admitted that the cooperation with local authorities can be regarded as helpful and efficient. The EUSBSR has been criticized for gloating with its inclusion of local actors without offering a sufficient basis for the cooperation (Kern & Gänzle, 2013b). According to Joas, Sanberg, and Kern (2007), transnational institutions are a central necessity for the functioning of macro regions and they have to imply hybrid understandings and arrangements between governmental actors and NGOs. Although general stakeholder participation seems to be of validity, the involvement of stakeholders at the macro-regional level does imply legitimacy and accountability problems as stakeholder participation is often limited to a small number of organizations which are in the position of having enough resources to actually take part in certain events.

4.3 Spreading the Fever: The EU Strategy for the Danube Region

The EU strategy for the Baltic Sea Region should primarily serve as a pilot strategy for the Baltic Sea Region. Even though it was not possible to actually evaluate the progress and efficiency of the strategy, an additional strategy, the EU Strategy for the Danube Region has already been developed.

The Eastern enlargement of 2004 can be considered a marking point and an indirect basis for the formation of the two EU macro-regional strategies. With the accession of Bulgaria and Romania in 2007, and Croatia in 2013 the Danube flows predominantly through EU territory and became therefore an EU internal waterway. The area which is covered by this strategy reaches from the Black Forest in Germany to the Black Sea in

Ukraine, Moldova and Bulgaria. The strategy consists out of 14 countries⁴ with a total population of 115 million inhabitants. The Danube river can be considered the most international river worldwide and especially with the enlargement of 2004 and 2007 can be regarded as a primarily EU river. While the river ends in the Black Sea, the EUSDR does not include this geographical fact within its framework (Bassetti & Carteny, 2012). In contrast to the EUSBSR, the Danube Strategy embraces three non-EU countries and Croatia as quite a new actor. Another difference is that the countries of the EUSBSR are geographically linked to the Baltic Sea, but not all countries of the Danube Strategy are directly positioned to the Danube River. Therefore, the Danube macro region “covers the broader catchment basin of the river” (Braun & Kovács, 2011, p. 82) and can therefore also handle projects that are not directly related to the Danube river.

Before the EUSDR has been introduced, the institutional landscape can be regarded as more complex and divided compared to the Baltic Sea Region. The Danube Region could hardly be classified as unified with respect to a shared regional identity or culture. This implies that the Danube Region is in a stronger need for region building to conquer political divisions and to manage more efficiently the Danube River.

Even though geographical symmetries can be found and a combination between old and new countries does also exist, the inclusion of non-EU countries as well as newer member states creates different asymmetries, especially with regard to economic differences and standards. Not all countries in the EUSDR are part of the *Acquis Communautaire* and a divergence in the regulatory framework does exist (Wulf, 2012). However, common challenges are visible which can only be handled with the common strategy. According to the Commission (2010), the most common challenges stretch from the transport and infrastructure to low competitive energy markets, social disparities, organized crime and a strong pollution level (European Commission, 2010a). The Danube Basin is known for its rich bio-diversity. The high level of pollution in the Danube River creates a real threat to the wildlife. Economic potentials are in need of reinforcement as they create high assets to different resources for business with regard to logistics, transport, culture and tourism.

Cooperation in the Danube Region can be dated back to the end of World War II. The focus laid upon the navigation of the Danube river, especially with regard to the transport issues. During and even after the Baltic wars, the coordination and

⁴ Romania, Bulgaria, Hungary. Slovenia, Slovakia, Czech Republic, Austria, Germany, Croatia, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Moldavia, Montenegro, Serbia and Ukraine.

reinforcement of the Danube River potentials were interrupted and intergovernmental cooperation stood still. The process of regaining peace in the area drew the attention of international organizations like the OSCE, UN, NATO, the Council of Europe and the EU to this area and reestablished intergovernmental cooperation. The EU was interested in defining bilateral arrangements with non-EU countries on the basis of accession partnerships with the use of the Instrument for Pre-accession Assistance (IPA), Cooperation Agreements under the realm of the ENP and different projects under the EU cohesion policy. The OCSE initiated the Danube Cooperation Process that took over the place of the Stability Pact for South Eastern European and South East Cooperation Initiative (SECI). Bulgaria took the initiative in 1996 to establish the South-East Cooperation Process and the Regional Cooperation Council (RCC) could be set up in 2008. Organizations which are directly linked to the sustainable management and improvement of the Danube River have been created. Among others, the Danube International Commission has been initiated in 1948 but was just able to operate in 1964. This gives also an insight into the difficulties of establishing transnational cooperations in an area which was so fragmented. In 1989, the Working Community in the Danube Countries could be created and even though the Council of Danube Cities and Regions has been launched in 1998, it was just formally established in 2009 (De Frantz, 2011; Groenendijk, 2013). The slow and often stagnated organization building for the environmental protection of the Danube River shows that the areas have often still different priorities at their hands: “While [environmental protection] being an important task, economic development has often served rather as a means to achieve political stabilization in the context of multilateral cooperation” (De Frantz, 2011, p. 7). Even though certain cooperative structures have been established before, they are not that institutionalized compared to the Baltic Sea Region and the regional institutions are not that connected yet (Gänzle & Kern, 2011). To enhance cooperation between the countries and the institutions and to benefit from the potentials the Danube Region offers, the EU decided to establish of the EU strategy for the Danube Region. The creation of the Danube strategy bases upon the same aspects of the three No’s (no new funds, legislation or funding) which have been already applied to the EUSBSR. The Commission points out that though the economic disparities between the countries of the Danube Strategy are rather unequal, a common territory is shared. Additionally, the interdependencies of the countries’ policies are quite strong and a stronger cooperative

framework has to be set up to limit pollution, to start up building transport links and to reduce the energy dependency (European Commission, 2012e).

In the initial preparation phase of the Danube Strategy, a ‘Danube Boom’ could be experienced (European Commission, 2010c, p. 1). Many countries which are actually not directly connected and linked to the broader Danube basin stated their interest to become a member of the strategy to benefit from the long term results. Commissioner Hahn warned that the concept of the Danube Region should not be overstretched in the direction of the Black Sea as it would lose its real identity. “Some would like to see this Strategy extend to the waters and maritime issues of the Black Sea. I believe we should keep our focus on the Danube. [...] But we should not duplicate the work that is being done under the Black Sea Synergy, which already provides a multilateral framework for tackling the most pressing issues” (European Commission, 2010c, p. 3). The ‘Danube Boom’ or more generally regarded the way of setting up macro-regions led to the situation that many actors wanted to become part of a macro region to get in a more complimentary position in the EU budget.

With the initial movements of the EUSDR, the European Parliament, in strong contrast with the first European macro-regional strategy, moved into the background and can only in July 2009, with the establishment of the Danube Intergroup, be linked to the Danube Strategy again (Schymik, 2011). In 2009, the European Commission was formally asked from the European Council to prepare the EUSDR. “The Danube needs a specific strategy comparable to the strategy we are developing for the Baltic Sea Region. A one-size-fit all approach doesn’t work in the EU [...]. We need a targeted policy for the Danube that meets its ecological, transport and socio-economic needs” (European Commission, 2013e, p. 79). Formal discussion rounds, public consultations as well as stakeholder conferences took place between the end of 2009 and the beginning of 2010. The proposal and the Action Plan have been introduced by the Commission on 8. December 2010. The consultation procedure, which was launched in 2010, was open to all EU member states as well as to third countries which are linked to macro-regional strategies. It was surprising to see that Russia took part in this period in quite a motivated fashion and was more involved as in the EUSBSR. The consultation procedures of the Danube Strategy have been organized differently compared to the EUSBSR. As the EU member states of the first strategy had to hand in confidential position papers, also known as ‘non-papers’, most of the member states of the Danube Region had to publish their documents in an official manner. Bosnia-Herzegovina,

Montenegro and Moldova were the only countries that did not submit any position papers (Gänzle & Kern, 2011).

The European Council stated with the adoption of the strategy under the Hungarian presidency in 2011 that it “called on all relevant actors to implement it without delay, as outlined in the Council’s conclusion of 13 April 2011; Member States are invited to continue work in cooperation with the Commission on possible future macro-regional strategies, in particular as it regards the Adriatic and Ionian region” (European Council, 2011d, p. 13). But before considering future projects, a closer look should be given towards the actual Action Plan of the EUSDR. The Action Plan seems to be quite unstructured as a long list of policies and key areas are given but no priorities or manuals to create synergies between policies have been laid out. Conflicting priorities like e.g. the policy area of transport and environment are particularly central to the Strategy. The Action Plan remains neutral and does not offer any solutions how to handle these conflicting policy areas. Moreover, the strategy misses to concentrate on the economic drivers of the EUSDR. These drivers “could have provided a positive spillover to all other policies and could have created, indeed, integrated policies of all kinds and combinations in DRS based on the common socio-economic development leading to prosperity” (Ágh, 2012, p. 7).

The governance structure seems similar to the one of the EUSBSR. The Action Plan defines four central pillars which cover the following areas.

- Connecting the Danube Region with other regions
- Protecting the environment
- Building prosperity
- Strengthening the Danube Region

The four pillars are split up into eleven Priority Areas. Having a look at this structure Table 3 shows that an obvious aspect is that non-EU countries are - in contrast to the EUSBSR - connected to coordinator groups even though they are always linked to an EU member state. The area of security and safety is the only one which is covered solely by EU member states. This division of labor supports the plan of decentralized network governance. However, this complex structure has to tackle quite an optimistic aim: “The structure should make this a truly 21st century region, sure and confident, and one of the most attractive in Europe” (European Commission, 2010a, p. 3).

Priority Area	Countries in Charge
P1 Mobility	<i>Inland waterways:</i> Austria, Romania <i>Rail, road and air:</i> Slovenia, Serbia
P2 Higher sustainable energy	Czech Republic, Hungary
P3 Culture and tourism	Bulgaria, Romania
P4 Water Quality	Hungary, Slovakia
P5 Environmental risks	Hungary, Romania
P6 Biodiversity	Bavaria (Germany), Croatia
P7 Knowledge Society	Slovakia, Serbia
P8 Competitiveness of enterprises	Baden-Württemberg (Germany), Croatia
P9 People and skills	Austria, Moldova
P10 Institutional Cooperation	Vienna (Austria), Slovenia
P11 Security	Germany, Bulgaria

Table 3: EUSDR: Priority Areas and Countries in Charge

As in the EUSBSR Sweden took the leading role for the adoption of the strategy, in the case of the EUSDR the EU presidency of Hungary took the final role of the adoption. “Once again, it became clear that EU member states played a pivotal role in the launching of strategy-formulation, while the Commission had accepted to facilitate [...] and later actively shape this process” (Gänzle & Kern, 2011, p. 11). Even though other member states and regions (Austria, Serbia, Slovakia, Romania and Baden-Württemberg) supported the initial idea of the Strategy, Hungary served and still serves as the central actor for the realization of the EUSDR.

After the macro-regional boom in 2010/2011, the EUSDR got the reputation of a “sleeping project” not only in Hungary but also in the whole European Union (Ágh, 2012, p. 11). Hungary shall not become a special case in this thesis but it is a good example to illustrate how the interest and motivation for the strategy can fade away. The realization of the Danube Strategy has always been a vision of Hungary as the Danube itself did not only form part of the nationality but also symbolizes the economic and logistic possibilities. Moreover it has been one of Hungary’s strongest motives to reinforce the neighborhood policy cooperation in the last twenty years. This shows that the Danube Strategy has always been a pressing matter for Hungary but since 2012, an overall party support for the Strategy is missing. Next to the state, the interest for territorial organizations has also been declining as an efficient bottom-up process has

not been possible in such a way as has been promised. “From the eleven [...] priority areas (PAs) Hungary has to coordinate three fields, the sustainable energy with Czech Republic, the water quality with Slovakia, and the environmental risks with Romania. In fact, Hungary has not yet taken the opportunities offered by the coordinating role in the three policy field allocated to Hungary by the Commission” (Ágh, 2012, p. 13). The decrease of the interest in the macro-regional strategies can be partly explained by the overwhelming financial crisis management of the European Union. Nevertheless, the behavior of Hungary shows that for a successful realization of macro-regional strategies not only transnational cooperations have to be strengthened but also the capacity of each of the individual countries itself.

However, still during its motivated presidency, the General Affairs Council defined its ‘Conclusions’ upon the EUSDR which bases upon the Action Plan defined for the Danube macro region. These conclusions have been prepared with the consultation of the Foreign Affairs Council which underlines again the external dimension of this strategy: Although the document stresses the internal character of the strategy as well as the preservation of the integrity of the decision making in the European Union, the Foreign Affairs Council “acknowledges that the inclusion and participation of third countries is crucial if the desired objectives of the strategy are to be achieved” (European Council, 2011b, p. 2). A crucial aspect of this documents seems to be the softening of the three “No’s” as it states that the Danube strategy is in need of support with “facilitating the coordination of existing EU funds” as well as offering technical assistance to the Priority Area Coordinators. While no additional institutions etc. have been set up, it has been acknowledged that additional assistance has to be provided to realize the strategy in an efficient manner. As is shown in the following case study, the document highlights not only a closer cooperation between the two strategies but also states the necessity for the member states to consider further strategies (European Council, 2011b, pp. 3,4).

4.4 Restarting the Fever: The EU Strategy for the Adriatic-Ionian Region

The “strategy will be demanding so we would want to be sure that any preparations are taken with a full awareness of the commitment involved. Political will should be matched by the willingness to commit resources” (Hahn, 2012). Regardless of the fact

that the Adriatic-Ionian Strategy is not officially adopted yet, the realization seems to be in full swing. The area of the next macro region consists of four EU Member States (Italy, Greece, Croatia and Slovenia) as well as four pre-accession countries (Bosnia and Herzegovina, Serbia, Montenegro and Albania). This composition shows that the macro region needs to be considered with the transformation of other programs like pre-accession policies (Bellardi & Rotoni, 2013).

The experiences from the last two strategies created a warning to handle the demanding strategy accordingly to limit possible implementation problems and to define clear goals. As can be seen in the process of this part, the realization of this strategy comes with some doubts and restrictions that extend the usual political consideration procedures. The question arises why this particular region has the competences to move towards being the next EU macro region while at the same time further approaches for macro regions are in discussion.

The Adriatic and Ionian Region can look back at more than 10 years of close cooperation not only between the states but also between regional initiatives. The Region has a strong traditional cooperative structure that is often characterized by a bottom-up process. This process has been developed especially during the 90s with the conflicts of former Yugoslavia. The civil society which was intensively supported by regional as well as local authorities laid the foundation for the strong transnational cooperation of today (Coletti, Cugusi, & Piccarozzi, 2007). “The Adriatic Ionian countries are bound not only by historical links and a common cultural heritage, but also by a shared responsibility for their sea“ (Damanaki, 2011, p. 2). In the course of time, the transnational cooperation shifted from a purely humanitarian and reconstructing focus towards issues regarding the economy, environment, culture or institution building. Therefore, further initiatives like the Adriatic Euro-region, the Association Forum of Adriatic and Ionian Cities and Towns or the Forum of the Adriatic and Ionian Chambers of Commerce have been created.

In addition, the transnational cooperation bases strongly on the Adriatic-Ionian Initiative (AII) which has been set up by the head of states in Ancona (Italy) in 2000. The idea behind this strategy is similar to the one of the EU strategy: To face common challenges and find solutions with regard to organized crime or the protection of the natural environment of the Adriatic-Ionian Sea. The activities can reach from tourism, university cooperations, to logistic and maritime cooperations. Despite these objectives, the results of the AII could not be considered as “translated sufficiently into concrete

action and results. Impact in real terms is still lacking” (European Commission, 2013g, p. 1). However, “the declared purpose of the AII is finalized to integrate the existing European strategies for Macro Regions with the Adriatic-Ionian Region strategy, bringing a significant contribution not only for the region itself but for the whole European Union’s territory” (Bassetti & Carteny, 2012, p. 58).

Although these transnational institutions have been set up, the Region still faces challenges with respect to ecological degradation, ineffective transport and logistics systems, a strong level of competitiveness and innovation, particularly in the touristic sector and the high level of pollution. “From overfishing to chemical pollution, the Adriatic and Ionian Regions face many challenges that can only be solved if all neighboring countries pull in the same direction” (Bresso, 2011, p. 2). As comparable to the other two strategies, a basis for transnational cooperation does exist but it is in need of improving its cooperation in a more professional and efficient manner. For these reasons, the European Council gave the mandate to the Commission in 2012 to formulate a new EU Strategy for the Adriatic Ionian Region before the end of 2014. The most important actors for the initiation of this strategy are formed by a coalition between the Member States which are closest to the Adriatic Sea as well as from quite active regions from the Italian Adriatic regions. In 2010, the Adriatic Ionian Council adopted a first declaration which approves the proposal for the EUSAIR. In this document, the Council asked its member states (Italy, Greece and Slovenia) to encourage the adoption by the Community institutions. Herewith, these member states took over the leadership position for this strategy and had an important role promoting this idea at the EU level (Cugusi, 2013). While Italy has always been a strong proponent of the strategy, with the crisis of the Berlusconi government, the attention for the strategy drifted away. With the setting up of the technical government with Mario Monti, the focus could be shifted back, in particular with the new negotiation round for the EU budget for 2014-2020. In particular Italian regional authorities created a significant integral part for the creation of the strategy. The Marche Region, which also assists the secretariat of the AII, has been central for building consensus for the initiative by including a high number of local organizations (Stocchiero, 2013).

Having a look at the composition of the macro region it is interesting to see that only half of the countries involved are actual member states of the European Union. Out of the eight member states of the strategy, the four countries (Serbia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro and Albania) are (potential) candidates to the European

Union which are assisted by the IPA. Even though the EU does not have the majority of member states in this strategy, it can still be categorized as an internal EU strategy as many of the challenges are enclosed by EU policy. This matter can already been underlined by the adoption of the Maritime strategy for the Adriatic and Ionian Seas which has been launched by the Commission in 2012. This strategy is directly linked to the EUSAIR, covers the same countries and is one of the key components of the strategy (European Commission, 2012a).

The geopolitical position of this macro region plays a central role as it is positioned in the centre of strong interconnections between Central Europe and the Mediterranean. The geographical position is - compared to the other two strategies - also quite unique as a very strong external dimension with the aim to strengthen the accession possibilities of the Western Balkan countries exists. “The macro-regional strategy could have a strong temporary external dimension that should become an internal dimension of the EU in future years” (Stocchiero, 2011, pp. 5,6).

With the realization of this strategy it becomes more obvious how all of the EU strategies are constructed, even overlapping or creating new bridges between different areas of the European Union. The Adriatic-Ionian Region should take its position into consideration and should form an architectural thinking about additional cooperation forms between the already established and potential macro regions. In this strategic thinking, the new EU member state Croatia can play a central role as it is a member state of the Danube macro region as well as the Adriatic-Ionian one. “Croatia defines itself as an Adriatic, Central European and Danube Country. An additional dimension it can offer within the framework of the Danube Strategy is to be a ‘bridge’ between the Danube area and the Adriatic i.e. the Mediterranean. This may provide such prospects to the overall cooperation within the Danube area that it can contribute [...] particularly to the strengthening of trade, transport and transit, as well as tourism” (Stocchiero, 2011, p. 7). In a long term one could even go a step further to find a linkage between the Adriatic and the Baltic Region to reinforce trade flows starting from the Mediterranean to Central and North Europe.

But before thinking in such a long run, it is possible that the new EU strategy will lead to a community challenge within the Mediterranean. Before the current composition of the Adriatic-Ionian Region was determined, different demands had been formulated. It was asked for a Western Mediterranean macro region including the EU member states of Spain, France, Italy, Greece, Malta and Cyprus as well as the third countries of

Tunisia, Syria, Morocco, Libya, Palestinian Authority, Algeria, Egypt, Israel, Jordan and Lebanon. The idea of this macro region seems to be quite unrealistic, especially as an EU strategy. This is primarily due to the strong external dimension and cooperation with very unstable countries, not functioning multi-level governance as well as missing legislative and democratic backgrounds. However, the demand for this macro region is still existent as it is reasoned that with the establishment of the EUSAIR, the South-Western part of Europe would fall behind and a gap between the different parts could develop (Tourret & Wallaert, 2010).

Though the Strategy is not officially agreed upon yet, four thematic pillars have already been defined:

- Reinforce marine growth and innovation
- Connection of the Region (Energy and Transport)
- Protection and Improving the Environment
- Strengthening regional attractiveness (tourism)

Additionally, “Research, innovation and SMEs development” and “Capacity Building” are central matters which will be linked to all Priority Areas. The discussion paper shows that each priority area will be handled by one EU and one non-EU member. While this contribution sounds like a fair deal Stocchiero points out that “the complexity of the coordination problem is even stronger when it also involves third countries. The success of EU macro-regional strategies depends firstly on the will of Member States, and secondly on the political interest of third countries to take part in this project” (Stocchiero, 2011, p. 12).

<i>Working Groups</i>	
Pillar	Countries in Charge
1. Driving innovative maritime and marine growth	Greece, Montenegro
2. Connecting the region	Italy, Serbia
3. Preserving and improving the environment	Slovenia, Bosnia and Herzegovina
4. Raising regional attractiveness	Croatia, Albania

Table 4: EUSAIR: Pillar Structure and Countries in Charge

The implementation of the Adriatic-Ionian Region could be fastening up as it will be in a quite beneficial position in 2014. The presidency of the EU Council shifts firstly to Greece and afterwards will be taken over by Italy. The two countries, especially Italy are strongly motivated to support the adoption of the next macro-regional strategy and are committed already beforehand to significant diplomatic efforts by designing the necessary Action Plan. The EUSAIR benefits from an overall support from actors at all levels of government in the Adriatic-Ionian Region. This can be explained due to the early awareness-raising and encouragement of regional authorities, forums and the work of the AII within this particular region (Cugusi, 2013).

4.5 Conclusion – Comparative Analysis

From the general description of macro regions and macro-regional strategies, this part uses a more practical approach by giving details to the three cases of the EUSBSR, EUSDR and EUSAIR. To conduct a comparative analysis, a table is shown in the following to sum up the main characteristics of this study.

	EUSBSR	EUSDR	EUSAIR
Number of Countries	- 9	- 14	- 8
Necessity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Environmental, infrastructural challenges - Hindrance to trade and energy supply - Coordination of cooperation frameworks - Differences in the economic development 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Environmental, infrastructural challenges - Coordination of cooperation frameworks - Low competitive energy markets - Organized crime - Differences in the economic development 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Environmental challenges - Coordination of cooperation frameworks - No strong level of competitiveness and innovation (touristic) - Differences in the economic development
Governance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Multi-level Governance (tendency: Top-down) - Fixed responsibilities - Process-oriented 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Multi-level Governance (tendency: Top-down) - Fixed responsibilities - Process-oriented 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Multi-level Governance (tendency: bottom-up) - Fixed responsibilities - Process-oriented

Initiators	- EP - Sweden	- Commission - Hungary	- Commission - Italy
Pre-established cooperation	- Strong: Own institutions	- Medium: shift from international to own institutions	- Strong: Own institutions
External Dimension	- One non-EU country ⇒ EU-Russia Relationship	- Five non- EU countries ⇒ ENP	- Four non-EU countries ⇒ Potential enlargement countries

Table 5: Overview of the Case Studies

Having a look at the three different case studies of macro-regional strategies one can argue that they are not that different at all. In particular the reason and common challenges for setting up a macro-regional strategy in that specific area are similar to each other. Of course, one has to keep in mind that every macro region has to cope with additional challenges especially in the social and cultural realm. However, the identical challenges have been defined as key elements for the establishment of macro-regional strategies. To face environmental challenges seems to be the prior aspect for initiating this way of territorial cohesion. With the EUSDR it is surprising to see that states are included which are not directly situated next to the Danube River. These countries do not directly have the interest to take measures for limiting the pollution levels but try to take advantage from e.g. the improved infrastructures which are a central point of the EUSDR's Action Plan.

Two dimensions which are varying in every macro region are the numbers of involved countries as well as the non-EU countries. The EUSDR stick out again as it has by far the highest number of member states as well as third countries. To coordinate an area with 14 different member states, some of them not even under the EU realm, can be quite challenging and difficult to monitor. In addition, the implementation procedures of the single countries can result in different time speeds. In an area with a higher number of countries involved the probability for different time speeds is more likely than in smaller macro regions with less non-EU countries that are not used to the EU procedures. This depends also on the responsible areas of the different countries. In the case of the EUSBSR, only one non-EU country, Russia, is involved which is quite limited in its fields of responsibilities. It is eligible that a macro region can be implemented and function smoother as it operates in an already known EU framework.

With regard to the EUSAIR one could argue that the non-EU countries are also more motivated to implement the strategy with regard to EU prerequisites as most of the non-EU countries are potential new EU candidates that already try to adapt to the EU framework. Due to the fact that the membership of the macro regions is mainly dependent on the geographical position of the states, different realization speeds of the strategies are possible. The impact of non-EU countries to macro regions and differentiated integration is further elaborated on in part 6.

The governance structure of macro regions is regarded as a renewed form of multi-level governance with an additional level of the macro region as well as prior established transnational cooperations and institutions like the CBSS. The idea behind this governance approach is to involve all of the different governance level and face problems at the most suitable level. However, the first two strategies show a tendency towards a top-down approach as central decisions and the way of procedures are determined either by the EU or nation states. Especially the EUSBSR was criticized for ignoring and not including the civil society in a sufficient manner. Comparing the EUSDR to the above elaborations, one needs to conclude that the second strategy follows a similar path. Having a look at the PAs of the two strategies one can see that the EUSBSR delegates areas to regions alone as the EUSDR only considers states. The distribution of PAs among the involved countries is also quite a striking aspect of the first two strategies. The initiators and supporters of the single strategy, in this case Sweden and Hungary have taken over the highest number of PAs. This can also be a threat to the further development of the macro regions as countries can be additionally involved in external and individual circumstances (e.g. financial crisis) and the relevance of a macro region can become less important. With regard to the EUSBSR it is obvious that the older states of the European Union are responsible for more Priority Areas compared to the newer member states.

In contrast, the EUSAIR shows clearly, not only due to the convenient dissemination of the number of countries that the countries of this strategy are distributed equally and that one EU member state is always linked to a non-EU country. Even though Italy was a forerunner in starting the EUSAIR, in particular the Adriatic regions of Italy took initiatives to start up the strategy. While this strategy is not fully implemented yet, a strong-bottom up approach, especially with respect to the inclusion of the civil society is visible. By looking through the Action Plants and Policy documents of the different strategies it becomes obvious that the EUSAIR has a more open and bottom-up

approach. Transparency has not only been shown by the availability of documents in this common state of art but also direct contact possibilities have been provided for each country involved.

Nevertheless, with regard to the governance structure of macro-regional strategies one cannot determine a common approach. The Commission has already stated in its report on the implementation of the EUSBSR that “groups of key actors such as regional and local authorities, NGOs and the private actors should be involved” (European Commission, 2011b, p. 7). This “third generation” method can result out of a combination between the top-down and bottom-up approach. The idea behind this method is to consider implementation as a process of a comprised and representative coalition or networking of mutual learning and the aim of different actors in a specific policy are to accomplish a policy. Having the case studies in mind this “third generation” can also be applied to these cases: The policy-decision of whether to include non-EU countries in macro-regional strategies is decided on at the top, the EU level, of the strategy. The actual implementation process is mainly realized by the state or even regional level. To sum up the governance part of this comparative case study analysis one can state that even though all of the strategies try or appear to promote the bottom-up approach, high political issues are dominating with the top-down approach. Although the basic idea of the MRS is the convenient collaboration on natural common goods (sea and the river basin) in normal terms they do not consist of internal and external administrative political dimension. However, high politics keep on being central in the strategies, especially in the internal and external association dynamics.

The cooperation between the various actors at the different levels depends also upon pre-established institutions and cooperations. The EUSBSR for instance can look back at a long established transnational cooperation in terms of the CBBS or HELCOM. In particular the CBSS has similarities to the transnational cooperation the European Strategies are planning on conducting. Looking at the priority areas one can see that the EUSBSR is the only strategy till now that delegates priority areas to e.g. the CBSS. One can argue of course that this strategy can benefit from these already established transnational cooperation structures. However, one central reason for the creation of the EUSBSR has been to improve the coordination and cooperation structures in this particular area. As the EUSAIR can also build its framework on the already established AII, the pre-established cooperation of the EUSDR seems rather thin. Even though different approaches have been defined a valid foundation to build up further

collaboration networks is rather missing as the region still seems to be more split up than the other two regions. The missing connection could be explained with international institutions like the OSCE that supported the approach of a closer region. The Danube River was not the central concern of this mission but rather peace development and national reconstruction. Approaches for a common network with regard to the Danube River basin started at a later stage and are not that mellowed compared to the other two cases. This unequal cooperative framework can also result out of the inclusion of different non-EU states which naturally have different economic and social backgrounds. In this case analysis one could already observe that each macro region does not only consist of non-EU countries. Not only the number of third countries does vary but also the tasks they are delegated to.

5. THEORETICAL PART DIFFERENTIATED INTEGRATION AND MACRO-REGIONAL STRATEGIES

5.1 Introduction: Is Disintegration the New Path of the European Union?

The theoretical part begins with an insight about the current status/problems of the integration process of the European Union and tries to answer what is truly wrong with the integration in the EU. A problematic foundation is of course no prerequisite for further European integration. However, this introduction tries to show why alternative integration processes are actually necessary. After the theoretical concept, this part tries to give an answer to the sub-research question: **To what extent can the concept of macro-regional strategies be applied to the dimensions of differentiated integration?**

On July 1st 2013, Croatia became the 28th member of the EU. It has been the latest enlargement round since 2007 when Romania and Bulgaria became part of the European Union. In the initial idea of the Union, enlargement should strengthen the EU, especially in an economic realm (Boutherin, 2013). The Eastern enlargement of 2004 has already started the discussion that enlargement does not necessarily lead to an ever closer Union but is a danger and risk to the whole European integration process. Jacques Delors who has been president of the European Commission from 1985 to 1995, argued that the chance of European disintegration will rise to 50% after the Eastern enlargement of ten new member states. Talking about enlargement, the term disintegration becomes more present. The British Prime Minister David Cameron even introduced the idea of a referendum on membership (Taylor, 2008). According to Taylor (2008), enlargement can be regarded as one of the most central aspects that challenge and dilute the integration process in the European Union. Nevertheless, it is of significance to be careful with such assumptions as reviewers often regard only one side of the coin and do not include the opportunities and advantages of an enlargement process. Despite this argument, the financial crisis of 2009 leaves no doubt that the EU skeptical voices become louder. In 2010, the German Chancellor Angela Merkel stated: “If the Euro fails, then not only the currency fails... Europe will fail, and, with it, the idea of the European unity” (Merkel, 2010). Even though this statement sounds quite dramatic, it underlines the development that the financial crisis does not only affect the Euro zone but the integration process itself. But what does disintegration actually mean?

When does a disintegrative process take place? It is naïve to argue that the European Union is now at a crossroad of its integration process. Taking into account for example the referenda against treaty changes in Ireland, Denmark, France and the Netherlands or the collapse of the European Defense Community project in 1954, the integration process of the European Union cannot be regarded a steady and smooth process (Krastev, 2012). According to the “Future of Europe” survey which has been funded and published by the European Commission in 2012, a high level of dissatisfaction among Europeans is apparent. Although 76% agree on the fact that the Union is a good place to live, the secure feeling of a strong economic Union has declined (European Commission, 2012c, p. 14). Their future perspectives are rather negative as six out of ten European citizens think that their next generation will experience an insecure economic future. Next to these more economic aspects, the survey also shows that 90% of the Europeans see a big gap between the preferences of the public and the government. No more than one third of all EU citizens have the feeling that their vote actually counts at the EU level (European Commission, 2012c, pp. 22-24). The democratic deficit in the European Union has been a weakness for the EU but with the current crisis, Europeans do not only lose their faith in European- but also in national politics. Measuring disintegration according to the democratic deficit one can argue that this process occurred already with the establishment of the political Union and cannot be regarded as a current appearance. Hence, the definition of disintegration is rather challenging. Webber (2013) defines the concept as referring to a decline in “the range of common or joint policies adopted and implemented in the EU, the number of EU member states and /or the formal (i.e. treaty-rooted) and actual capacity of EU organs to make and implement decisions if necessary against the will of individual members” (Webber, 2013, p. 2). Taking this definition into account, a possible disintegration is rather unreal as due to the fiscal crisis more common policies have been adopted, no member state in fact left the Union and no decrease of the EU decision-making could be observed. Nevertheless, the disintegration approach, a failing Europe or the collapse of the European Union, are ideas that are more present than in earlier times.

One can define European integration as a growing transfer of governance from the national towards the European level (Sweet & Sandholtz, 1997). Is it possible to just turn the table and define European disintegration as transfer of governance structures back to the respective national levels? Would a reduction of the supranational power of the European Union occur? Before going into detail, the following part shows how

disintegration can be explained from a theoretical point of view by the traditional theories of European Integration and how differentiated integration as an alternative approach regains attention.

5.2 Traditional Theories: an Explanation for Disintegrative Movements in the EU?

Taking a look at the traditional theories of European integration one can observe that they primarily look at integration in one way. They focus on the initial and on the development phase of the integration process but do they also consider and explain disintegration? According to P. Schmitter (2004) “any comprehensive theory of integration should potentially be a theory of disintegration” (C. Schmitter, 2004, p. 47). Neo-functionalism emphasizes the relevance of functional interest for supranational governance in line with the power decline of nation states, while intergovernmentalism claims that regional integration could only occur due to bargains between member states. Even though they lack elaborations on why integration actually takes place they can explain procedural features behind disintegration. Ernst Haas defined quite an optimistic theoretical framework on integration. Nevertheless, Haas and other neo-functionalists realized in the 1960s and in begin of 1970s that a political backward integration occurred and not only spillover but also spill-back was possible (Haas, 1976; P. Schmitter, 1971). A spill-back describes the situation in which a retraction away from obligations occurs and rules are not necessarily obeyed anymore. With regard to the disintegration process, a spill-back explains the situation in which member states are no longer willing to deal with particular policy fields at the European level. The changes of preferences can also lead to a transformation of the interest coalitions among member states which can weaken the commitments towards European rules. Hence, one can state that it is relevant for member states to demand solutions from the EU political system to sustain the integration process. A decrease of EU demands can lead to a reduction of European integration. Although this can partly explain disintegration in neo-functionalist thinking, one has to keep in mind that European integration does not solely ‘spill-back’ to states. Due to the European integration process, states are not necessarily the ending point of disintegration. Sub-national and cross-border regions have to be included especially due to the fact that neo-functionalism puts an emphasis on the demand flow and interdependence. “The interdependence in trans-national border

regions may be too strong for any full-scale return to national states, while the demand flow from sub-national regions towards ‘Brussels’ may increase the expense of national capitals” (Vollard, 2008, p. 8).

According to Haas, the theory of neo-functionalism can offer another link to a possible theory of disintegration. Looking at European integration defined by Haas, it is obvious that disintegration cannot be seen as a revised version of integration. Haas stated that “political integration is the process whereby political actors in several distinct national settings are persuaded to shift their loyalties [...] toward a new centre, whose institutions possess or demand jurisdiction over the pre-existing national state” (Haas, 1968, p. 16). A reversed thinking cannot be applied here as one cannot expect that political actors automatically transfer their political activities immediately back to the nation state but could prefer the trans-national or regional actors instead. Therefore, disintegration cannot be consequentially regarded as a pure option between member states of the European Union. For defining disintegration it is relevant to include multi-layered constructions.

Neo-functionalism can give some explanations of disintegration but still lacks an elaboration on why and how this phenomenon can happen.

Though MLG does not belong to the tradition theories of European integration it influences the integration process of the European Union. MLG does not present a theory but it can show the political configuration in which disintegration can occur. As already mentioned, disintegration does not only take place between the supranational and national level but is a multilayered process. MLG points out that the outcome of disintegration is not the only aspect to look at. It is also relevant to take into account what is precisely where disintegrating (Vollard, 2006).

Even though this part cannot find a clear and a fully explanation for the process of disintegration, it shows that a clear change of direction occurred within the integration process of the European Union. Due to enlargement, stronger member states, and variations in preferences, the integration course cannot be regarded as straight anymore but develops even backward trends. A common integration process slows down and as the following part shows, a more flexible approach arises.⁵

⁵ Disintegrative moments of the EU are sometimes also explained by theories of transactionalism and approaches about the fall and decline of empires. For more information see Motyl (2001) and Deutsch (1957)

5.3 Turn Old into New: The Revival of Differentiated Integration

The previous parts show that the development of the integration process in the European Union is in need of an alternative course. Arising challenges can lead to diversity of preferences with regard to integration as well as diversity of the capacity to integrate. This particular type of integration handles the typical political problem of collective action. It describes the situation in which an outcome that is beneficial for most of the involved actors, in this case the majority of certain member states, is blocked by several other member states as they find individual reasons to turn down the proposal. This approach can also be associated with the methods of ‘issue-linkage’ and ‘side-payments’. These techniques smooth the progress of integration by the buying of the opposition (Dyson & Sepos, 2010). Hence, one can describe differentiated integration as a type of European integration that is not in need of all member states to take part in every integration project or that also permits member states to realize European policies at their own speed (Junge, 2007). The European Security and Defense Policy (ESDP), the Euro area or ‘Schengen’ Europe are some examples of the differentiated form of integration. As already discussed in the literature review, this form of flexible integration is not a new phenomenon and has already been pointed out by the Treaty of Rome. Another and most current example is the development of macro-regional strategies. Even though these strategies are not legally binding they share many parallels with the debate on differentiated integration. One can argue that they can be regarded as the new form of flexible integration in the EU. MRS have been set up to confront challenges in specific areas and lead therefore to another type of territorial cooperation (Gänzle & Kern, 2011).

The following part tries to find the origin of differentiated integration on the basis of the traditional integration theories. Thereafter, the theory of differentiated integration is described in detail and shows different dimensions of this alternative integration theory that can also create a link to the external dimension of the macro-regional strategies.

5.4 Back to the Roots – Differentiated Integration and the Grande Theories

The nature of differentiated integration can most effectively be explained by the classical integration theories, already mentioned in this chapter. It is relevant to ask

whether differentiated integration can be regarded as a new theory to explain European integration or whether and where it can be placed in the rigid scheme of the classical integration theories. De Neve (2007) formulates the assumption that “all theories of European integration – both rationalist and constructivist – should be revisited to come up with a satisfactory analysis of the processes of differentiated integration” (De Neve, 2007, p. 515).

Neo-functionalism and liberal intergovernmentalism are the most suitable theories to explain differentiated integration. However, Schimmelfennig *et al* points out that in particular these classical theories overlooked the new approach owing to the fact that their objective is to elucidate integration instead of differentiation. This approach is unanticipated as the flexible integration is a significant and integral part of the European integration process (Schimmelfennig et al., 2011). Even though these *Grande* theories cannot explain in detail the emergence and functioning of differentiated integration, they offer relevant aspects to understand parts of differentiated integration. Neo-functionalism can for example enlighten the functional dimension which is central for understanding differentiated integration. The model of spill-over can clarify the increasing integration in the economic area from the single market to the European Monetary Union (EMU). The functional and political spill-over on unanticipated interdependencies may give reason for why member states that participate in the integration process may try to intensify integration in a certain policy field and make an effort to spread out to a related area. This is only a partial explanation because neo-functionalism fails to explain why the effects of spill-over only concern certain member states and policy fields. It also fails to make clear why supranational actors cannot find a common position between the different preferences of the Member states, even though they are endowed with mediating responsibilities. Moreover, the classical theory cannot give reasons why certain forms of differentiated integration are more common in certain policy fields than others (Dyson & Sepos, 2010).

Intergovernmentalism, with its liberal variant, states that national preferences are the driving force for the integration process. On this basis it can explain why states with the same preferences tend to work together and why states with opposed interest have a tendency to block this approach. Even though Moravcsik includes the prospect of a flexible integration, he argues that this possibility can be rather regarded as a threat (Kölliker, 2006). However, it is still unclear why in the procedure of intergovernmental bargaining the threat of other coalitions and the possibility of segregation by the

initiating member states does not lead to enough “negative policy externalities” with the effect that noncompliant states would be encouraged enough to take part in the proposal (Moravcsik, 1993, p. 502).

The last classical theory of constructivism that can partly explain differentiated integration bases its assumptions on an ontological perspective. In contrast to inter-governmentalism, constructivism does not only focus on the national interest but also how integration can be influenced by identities and norms (Bomberg, Peterson, & Stubb, 2008). According to constructivism, differentiated integration can be explicated on the grounds of multiple identities which bring into being the need of setting up agreements with states that share the same identity and norms. However, the theory cannot explain why “socialization and norm transfer have not been sufficient in creating shared interests that would prevent states from seeking differentiated integration inside or outside the *acquis*” (Dyson & Sepos, 2010, p. 18). Additionally, it cannot figure out why particular forms of flexible integration are more recognized than others in the social dialogue.

While the classical theories have many lacks for explaining differentiated integration, Schimmelfennig *et al* use these theories to develop a theory of flexible integration by arguing that “they provide all the basic ingredients” (Schimmelfennig et al., 2011, p. 2). From a governance point of view, multi-level governance argues that differentiated integration corresponds to the idea of the multi-level polity which is typified with variability, unpredictability and multiple actors at different levels (Hooghe & Marks, 2001). However, one has to keep in mind that multi-level governance is not a theory of integration and limits therefore the usefulness of clarifying the origin of differentiated integration.

5.5 Definition and Conceptualization

To fully understand this kind of integration it is important to set certain limitations to avoid concept stretching. The term ‘integration’ is not a synonymous for ‘cooperation’, ‘union’ or ‘Europeanization’. Cooperation describes the situation of working together without merging and assigning sovereignty. Europeanization describes the consequences and results of the European integration process upon the member states and does not focus on the argumentation why these states play a role.

According to Edwards and Phillipart (1997), differentiated integration keeps on being a concept that is “replete with terminological and semantic confusion” (Edwards & Phillipart, 1997, p. 1). To clarify the terminology and its various forms is challenging due to the fact that the term is used differently in EU legal documents, by politicians or theorists. Differentiated integration is therefore also known under the terms of flexibility integration, multi-speed, *à la carte*, enhanced cooperation, closer cooperation, centre of gravity or variable geometry (Koller, 2012).

Dyson and Sepos (2010) tried to articulate a definition that combines the territorial, the functional and the legal perspective:

“Differentiated integration is the process whereby European states, or sub-state units, opt to move at different speeds and/or towards different objectives with the regard to common policies. It involves adopting different formal and informal arrangements (hard and soft), inside or outside the EU treaty framework (membership and accession differentiation, alongside various differentiated forms of economic, trade and security relations). In this way actors come to assume different rights and obligations and to share a distinct attitude towards the integration process – what is appropriate to do together and who belongs with whom” (Dyson & Sepos, 2010, p. 4).

Stubb (1996) categorizes differentiated integration in a more comprehensive way by defining three main concepts along the three variables of time, space and matter. The first concept of ‘multi-speed Europe’ preserves the basic principles of the traditional European integration scheme and is known as the least radical one compared to the following two concepts. It assumes that all member states of the EU have the capability to define common goals of integration and that these goals are agreed upon and implemented by all member states. The ‘time’ aspect of this concept is relevant because it allows every state to realize the agreed policy objectives in their own time and does not have a fixed timetable for implementation.

Multi-speed Europe tries to achieve not a permanent but a temporary integration at different degrees. To avoid an enduring separation between the different member states due to different rates of integration, the slower states are supported by the advanced states in the course of catching up. “Multi-speed Europe thus maintains the legal and

institutional structure of the EU as well as the objective of an ever closer union among all member states” (Junge, 2007, p. 397).

The variable geometry describes the second category (space) which considers the European continent as a whole. This shows clearly a difference to the two other categories as they focus on individual policies instead of the whole EU. The member states are separated into several concentric circles in which further circles are arranged around the central circle. It can be defined as “the mode of differentiated integration which admits to unattainable differences within the main integrative structure by allowing permanent and irreversible separation between the core of countries and lesser developed integrative units” (Stubb, 1997, p. 39). Variable geometry is also known for its sub variations like two-tier, multi-tier, multi-level, opt-up or opt-in. All these sub categories correspond to integration differentiated by space (Stubb, 1996).

The last type of differentiated integration describes a pick and choose (matter) situation on the *à la carte* basis. This model is known as the most radical one due to the fact that member states can chose, like from a menu, which policies are beneficial for them and which they want to be part of. In contrast to the multi-speed approach which tries to keep and achieve a supranational set of common aims by all member states, the *à la carte* method is more based upon an intergovernmental view of integration in which the national interests are more dominant and hence, each member state can decide individually in which policy area to participate (Stubb, 1996).

The three mentioned concepts by Stubb describe the ideal types of differentiated integration in the EU. They differ to a very high extent owing to the fact that multi-speed Europe focuses upon time, *à la carte* integration differentiates by policy and variable geometry by space. These different approaches also lead to different degrees of integration between the member states. As the first method is merely effecting the time period, a higher degree of integration is possible for all member states. The *à la carte* approach cannot achieve this outcome and will always end in different degrees of EU integration as the different member states have a tendency to pick different policies to fulfill. The last method promises a more profound level of integration across a wide range of issues for some EU member states as well as a lower degree of integration for other member states. This can occur due to the fact that different member states are grouped into circles that fit to their capacity and compliance to progress (Kölliker, 2001).

Holzinger and Schimmelfennig (2012) do not only criticize the mono-dimensionality of Stubb's categorization, they also argue that in particular the 'space' and 'matter' are wrongly labeled as these two concepts can be found in all cases of differentiation. In terms of solving this situation, they define their own arrangement of differentiation integration by defining the following six variables:

1. Permanent vs. temporary
2. Territorial vs. purely functional
3. Differentiation across nation-states vs. multi-level differentiation
4. Differentiation takes place within the EU treaties vs. outside of the EU treaties
5. Decision-making at the EU level vs. at the regime level
6. Only for member states vs. also for-non EU states/ areas outside the EU territory

As the first dimension can be immediately linked to Stubb's first dimension of time, one could also argue that the second one would cover the concepts of space and matter. Time can be categorized as a central aspect of differentiation as e.g. multi-speed Europe bases on this concept. Differentiation by time is also a very central topic with regard to enlargement, financial assistance to post-accession processes and a general deepening and widening of the EU (Matarrelli, 2012). According to Holzinger and Schimmelfennig (2013) the two concepts of space and matter are actually included in all types of differentiation. "Differentiation has always a territorial aspect, as some countries or regions do not participate in integration. And it has always a sectoral aspect, because it applies to specific policies and rules" (Holzinger & Schimmelfennig, 2012, p. 8). They also argue that the categorization should not be between space and matter but rather between a fixed and flexible membership in regimes. However, a line between the territorial and the purely functional differentiation has been drawn. This theoretical approach leaks the practical reality as all of their defined models of differentiation have a territorial aspect. The only example they can use for their argumentation is the Functionally Overlapping Competing Jurisdiction (FOCJ) as a pure functional example of differentiated integration. In a FOCJ jurisdiction is defined with specific functions which can also extend beyond other jurisdictions that are responsible for other individual functions⁶.

⁶ For more information about the FOCJ please have a look at: Frey B. and Eichenberger (1997) FOCJ. Competitive Governments for Europe. *International Review of Law and Economics*, 16(3), 315-327.

Dimension 3 investigates whether the involved actors are states or whether a multi-level governance approach is dominant. According to Schimmelfennig et al. (2011), differentiated integration can be mainly found in a cooperation between states. The next dimension describes a type of sub-integration that can be situated outside of the EU framework but does solely deal with policies that are within the EU domain. Dimension 5 covers the idea of sovereignty with regard to the decision-making process. It is relevant to figure out whether the decision-makers do consist out of the states which are part of the agreement or out of all EU member states combined.

The last dimension - and for this thesis the most relevant one - is actually quite straightforward. It can be handled with a simple 'Yes' and 'No' answer. Does the regime expand its field outside the EU territory/ does it involve non-EU countries?

5.6 The Linkage between the Dimensions of Differentiated Integration and Macro-Regional Strategies

The conclusion of the case studies shows that the three different cases are in most categories quite similar. For applying the six dimensions of differentiated integration to the macro regions, the cases are combined as they do not show significant differences.

The first dimension can be clearly put in operation. The structure of a MRS can be permanent and a specific deadline for the strategies is not defined. Considering the content of the strategy, it has to be regarded as more flexible, as it can be revised continuously.

Territorial as well as functional elements are visible within a macro region, which complicates the distinction between those two. However, the territorial aspect dominates the process and leads to territorial differentiation. Even though the cases have shown that some macro regions had a tendency towards a more top-down approach, all of them base their governance structure upon a multi-level framework. The inclusion of sub-national authorities is highlighted as being central to the realization of the strategies. The cases show comprehensively that the strategies are internal EU strategies and while the number of non-EU countries can vary, the responsibility is placed at the EU level (Bengtsson, 2009).

Even though existing regional organizations like the CBBS have been involved in the strategies (EUSBSR), the central position remains at the EU level. The Commission has

a central role with regard to monitoring the implementation of the strategies and information exchange, the main decision-making power is situated at the Council.

The macro regions involve a different number of non-EU states within their macro regions. This is necessary as the macro regions are determined in functional terms to achieve the purposes of the single strategies. The interesting part of this dimension is to go behind this Yes/No approach and analyze the impacts of different regions and non-EU states upon the macro regions and the EU in general. Does it have an impact on the differentiation process? Can it actually happen that a differentiated integration not only occurs in the EU but also between single macro regions?

As already elaborated in the literature review of the introduction, the external dimension of the macro-regional strategies is investigated inadequate. Taking into account the sixth dimension of differentiated integration, the link between this dimension and the external dimension does not exist yet. It is in particular appealing to take another look at the dimension and to investigate whether different non-EU states can have an impact on the differentiated integration of the European Union. Therefore, the following sub-research question has been defined: **What does the external dimension look like for each of the three cases?**

5.7 Conclusion

Even though the alternative integration process of differentiated integration is not a totally new approach, not only the current European crisis but also new territorial cooperation structures like the establishment of macro regions revitalized the attention towards this integration theory. Due to the fact that the concept is applied differently in politics as well as in scientific research, the structuring of a common and universally applicable definition is rather complicated. Different dimensions have been determined for differentiated integration which can also be applied for the link between macro-regional strategies and differentiated integration. The only dimension which seems worth for further investigation is the one with regard to the external dimension of macro regions. The external dimension is elaborated in more detail in the next part.

6. THE EXTERNAL DIMENSION OF THE THREE MACRO-REGIONAL STRATEGIES

6.1 Introduction

After giving a detailed description of the concept of macro regions and macro-regional strategies on the basis of the cases studies, this part introduces the external dimension and the EU relations with the included non-EU countries. The cases of the EUSBSR, EUSDR and the EUSAIR have different non-EU states included which have special pre-relations with the EU. As some of them are included in the European Neighborhood Policy (ENP) those are interested and already in discussion for accessing the EU.

Looking at the actual composition of the external dimensions only one relation can be classified as straight forward; the relationship between Russia and the EU. This relationship is quite individual and seems to be dominated by a power struggle. The external dimensions of the EUSDR and EUSAIR are not that clearly defined, as an overlap between these two strategies exists. Even though one links the EUSDR rather to the ENP due to the inclusion of Moldova and Ukraine and the EUSAIR to the enlargement policy as candidate countries are included, many countries are situated in both countries and therefore they cannot clearly be linked to one specific macro-region. However, the EUSDR will still be linked to the ENP as it is the only current EU strategy that actually includes countries from the ENP program. The thesis links the EUSAIR to the enlargement policy although one has to keep in mind that countries of the EUSAIR are also included in the EUSDR. This linkage is drawn as the EUSAIR has only non-EU countries that are willing to become members of the EU. The EU Strategy for the Danube Region instead does include non-EU states with different intentions and grades of development. Therefore, even though a clear separation between those two strategies cannot be drawn, the classifications will remain similar for describing the prior EU relations.

The thesis does not have the possibility to give a quite detailed overview about these external processes but provides necessary background information of the countries concerned. This part tries to give an answer to the sub-question: **What does the external dimension look like for each of the three cases?**

On his last day of being Russia's Prime Minister in 1999, Vladimir Putin started his speech about the future of Russia with the question: "What place can Russia occupy in the international community in the 21st century?" (Putin, 1999, p. 2). This question can be categorized as rather rhetorical as no actual answer has been provided. The interesting aspect is that he did not mention the European Union at all in its future planning. Russia feels comfortable to limit the relation to the EU to bilateral relations and agreements, in which only Germany has a special role as the country itself.

Before going into detail about the relation between the EU and Russia, it is relevant to have a look at the Baltic Sea Region as in general, it is the most relevant basis for the relationship between these actors. In contrast to the EUSBSR, the Baltic Sea Region has no clear definition about the involved countries and also no defined rules and standard. Therefore, it is quite difficult to paint the whole picture about this region as it can vary. Next to the countries defined in the EUSBSR, regional organizations like the Baltic Development Forum (BDF) and the Council of the Baltic Sea State (CBSS) also consider Norway and Iceland part of the Baltic Region with a more Northern outlook. In the Wise Men's report on the Baltic and Nordic Co-operation a clear distinction between the Nordic state and the Baltic Region has been mentioned: "The Nordic countries were among the strongest supporters of the Baltic countries' independence and their public support considerably influenced public opinion worldwide" (Birkaves & Gade, 2010, p. 1). Despite the fact that a clear territorial inclusion is rather missing one can state that even with the inclusion of Norway and Iceland, the Russian Federation remains the only country that is not part of the EU or the European Economic Area (EEA). The Baltic Sea Region can therefore be viewed as a separating point between the two powers of Russia and the EU.

The Council of the Baltic Sea States (CBSS) has been set up in 1992 to "serve as an overall regional forum to focus on the needs for intensified cooperation and coordination among the Baltic Sea States" (CBSS, 1992, p. 1). This is one central institution that has been established since the collapse of the Soviet Union to build up and strengthen the Baltic Sea Region. The Northern Dimension (ND) is constructed on the same historical background and offers a framework for dialogue and actual cooperation of the countries involved. It bases on equal cooperation between the EU, Russia, Iceland and Norway with the aim to support stability, economic cooperation and

prosperity in the Northern part of Europe and the Baltic Sea Region. The ND tries to strengthen the relation of the EU and Russia, especially in the Baltic Sea Region. The goal is to create and intensify synergies with regional programs and projects (Ministry of Foreign Affairs Finland, 2012).

One interesting aspect of the above mentioned institutions is that none of them has its basis in Russia or has been created by the country but mainly initiated and supported by Sweden and Denmark. This can of course also be explained by the historical and political changes Russia had to go through after 1989. In that time, Russia was quite interested in the Baltic Sea Region as it could serve as a transition area to Europe, especially to Germany and the Northern countries. After Russia's first recovery period of approximate ten years, the cooperation between Russia and the EU changed from a one-sided dependency towards a mutual one. As the Russian economy has been dependent on the EU markets for primarily its energy exports and consumer goods, the EU was quite dependent on Russia's energy resources. Current data shows, that this dependency is still dominant. The EU imported 84% of Russia's oil and 76% of the natural gas in 2013 (European Commission, 2013d).

Additionally, one can argue that the Baltic Sea region is a connection area for both territories for geopolitical and security issues with the energy sphere as the dominant mutual matter. A cooperation example for the energy sphere is the construction of the North Stream gas pipeline which is build across the Baltic Sea to transfer natural gas from Russia to Germany. Although this project is quite controversial due to ecological and environmental aspects, the actual establishment of the pipeline also shows the EU's dependency on energy, and in this case this also means the dependency on Russia (Cameron, 2010).

Another common relationship between the EU and Russia bases on the European Neighborhood and Partnership Instrument (ENPI). This instrument builds up the EU's influence on Russia by applying the principle of conditionality. The ENPI holds the prerequisite that Russia has to improve its democratic values and the rule of law to come closer to the EU values. However, "Russia views this demand as an encroachment on Russia's sovereignty, not only making Russia the EU's junior partner in Europe, but also degrading Russia to the same level of the other ENP countries, like Morocco, Moldova or the Caucasus states" (Elo & Kaakkuriniemi, 2012, p. 15). This statement shows that Russia cannot be compared to other ENP countries that are aiming for further EU cooperation and maybe even for EU membership. Russia tries to crystallize

its own power and independence and the current relationship to the EU bases more on the principle of a partnership between two powers instead of a one-sided dominance.

According to Musiał (2009), the Baltic Sea Region can be regarded as a territory that has over centuries been involved in political, economic and geopolitical conflicts between Russia and Europe. After the end of the Cold War challenges are still to overcome and the fact that over the last two decades the Baltic Sea was primarily maintained and imagined as an EU inland sea did probably not help (Larsen, 2008). As the initial idea of the ENP could not ease the conflicts between the two actors, the EU initiated two further concepts with regard to the Baltic Sea Region. First of all, the EU renewed the Northern Dimension policy in 2006 which is now taken over by the EU's External Action Service. The policy has the aim to strengthen the Union's standards and values (Browning & Joenniemi, 2004). One anticipates from Russia on the one hand that it adapts to the policy and on the other hand, that it will "resist that adaption without being able to affect the essential content of these norms in any significant way" (Haukkala, 2010, p. 172). The distant relation can also be observed from 2006 on from the EU side. Since then, the EU fosters its relation with the Eastern countries, especially after the big enlargement. However, Russia did not go along. The development of new cooperation structures has been limited and the relationship remains quite isolated. With Russia becoming a member of the WTO a new basis for possible cooperation structures emerges (Camacho & Melikhova, 2013).

The second concept initiated by the EU to reinforce cooperation in the Baltic Sea region is the idea of a macro-regional strategy, the EUSBSR. The special position of Russia within this strategy is elaborated in the following.

6.3 Russia and the EUSBSR

To discuss the inclusion of Russia in the EUSBSR it is relevant to go back to the planning stage of the Strategy. Even though the EP initiated Strategy for the Baltic Sea, the Commission has been chosen to take over the responsibility for constructing the EUSBSR. On the one hand the Commission is less influenced by political interests and on the other hand it can guide the development of the strategy along existing and future policies according to a horizontal approach (Gänzle & Kern, 2011). The consultation period underlines the way of policy development as "it was intended to gain substantial

input for the direction and structure of the strategy, in turn yielding increased legitimacy once adopted (and also smoothing the adoption process itself” (Bengtsson, 2009, p. 3). Although this consultation process had the aim to clarify the process, it was unclear to what extent Russia is actually involved. The period was open for all actors, including NGOs, the private sector and the general public, to participate. This general possibility of participation can also be applied to the non-EU countries like the Russian Federation, Norway and Iceland. However, it is relevant to point out that Russia had the possibility to take part, but was not directly asked for its input. The Russian Ministry for Foreign Affairs as well as the Russian Ministry for Regional Cooperation had been informed about the consolidation process. However, Russia did not take part. This non-participation can be interpreted from different angles. On the one hand, one can argue that Russia considers the Strategy as a purely internal EU strategy where the participation of Russia is not necessary. On the other hand, Russia claims that the EUSBSR has been developed without consulting Russia. The latter aspect might have resulted from the lack of institutional cooperation (Klein & Makarov, 2009; Kuliesaitė, 2013). Nevertheless, the fact that the EU did not formally ask the Russian federation to take part into the consultation process did not necessarily help the already difficult relationship between these two powers.

Owing to the fact that the EUSBSR was from its very beginning defined as an internal EU strategy, the only possibility for Russia to participate has been through already established transnational cooperations like the CBSS or the Northern Dimension. Russia was invited by the European Union to participate in the strategy through the ND as it offers the foundation for external issues of cooperation in the Baltic Sea Region. This has already been stated by the Council in 2007, being a proof of not including Russia, even before the consultation process (European Council, 2007). This also shows that the inclusion of Russia was actually already handled before the action plan has been formed and the implementation of the strategy has been set in motion. Nevertheless, the EU is aware that certain policy fields like climate change or security issues can only be solved with the inclusion of Russia. The application of the Northern Dimension seems to be the most practical approach. Even though the EU considers this approach as the most realistic one, certain limitations can occur due to this way of operation. Next to the doubt whether Russia has actually enough flexibility to participate in the EUSBSR through the ND, the geographical and cooperation coverage of the ND differs to the one of the EUSBSR. As the ND only covers four areas of partnership, the EUSBSR covers a

wider range. “On the one hand, this arrangement seems reasonable, since it links the ND with the EUSBSR and, thus, might help the EU to achieve better coordination of its Baltic Sea Region policies, as both frameworks should work for the same goals. On the other hand, however, making the agenda of the renewed ND dependent on the EUSBSR might increase Russia’s unwillingness for future co-operation. This is because the EUSBSR as an internal EU strategy might arouse Russia’s suspicion that the EU is seeking to dilute Russia’s power in the Baltic Sea Region” (Elo & Kaakkuriniemi, 2012, p. 16). It can be argued that this interaction can lead to new dividing lines between the EU and Russia. This can be considered quite ironic as the initial idea of the ND was to reduce the discrepancies between these two actors by combining the Northern part to find solutions to common struggling points. As the ND covers more the practical and functional problems, the CBSS tries to find a common voice in the political realm. While this institution has a rotating presidency system, Russia’s turn has been in the year of 2012/2013. This rotating system offers each presidency the opportunity for agenda setting for one year. It is interesting to see what preferences Russia set for this time frame. One expected two major and innovative changes from the Russian presidency:

1. A new Russian Baltic doctrine and
2. New proposals to increase and strengthen its policies with the EUSBSR

In spite of these expectations, Russia did not include these issues in its agenda setting program. The country started its presidency by stating that the CBSS is in need of actively cooperating with other regional organizations but any hierarchy or integration schemes should be avoided. In the same breath, the presidency could not “be either a subject or an object in [the EUSBSR], since it was designed according to EU rules and interests, and therefore Russia had elaborated its own strategy for its northwestern federal district up to 2020” (Oldberg, 2012, p. 19). Russia also pointed out that consultations with the European Commission were held with regard to the cooperation in the Baltic Sea region and a list with potential missions has been formed. Russia’s prerequisite is however, that all these possible projects can only be realized under the realm of the CBSS. The aim of the Russian’s presidency is to support the CBSS as becoming the main coordinator of regional cooperation in order to have the

responsibility over all central issues with respect to Russian national interests (Kern & Gänzle, 2013b).

With the enlargement of 2004, Russia became increasingly worried that the CBSS would be taken over by the EU as more countries of the CBSS became members of the European Union. Making the Council an instrument of the European Union would destabilize the existence of the CBSS. Russia even argues that Brussels could learn something from the border and inter-regional cooperation performed by the CBSS. Before Russia took over the presidency, one expected that Russia would acknowledge the necessity of the European Union as a Partner in the Baltic Sea Region. After a delayed program, it was obvious that Russia had no intentions to develop a new conceptual approach to its BSR policy or to reinforce interactions with Brussels' strategies in this particular region (Makarychev & Sergunin, 2013). This approach shows that Russia has a tendency towards transnational cooperation as long as it is not dominated by another actor, in this case the European Union. This argument can be underlined by the implementation of the North-West Russia Socio-Economic Development Strategy. As already mentioned above, the Strategy shall be realized until 2020 and is comparable to a macro-regional strategy. Its objectives are to function as an instrument that implements regional programs to support the social and economic process in the territories. The strategy covers, like the EUSBSR various areas like environmental protection or cross-border cooperation and one can even argue that the two strategies appear to be quite similar with regard to the geographic coverage and the priority directions. One can get the impression that the Russian North-West Strategy could serve as compensation and counterbalance to the EUSBSR. Even though the Strategy was distributed amongst the Baltic Sea Member States and the European Commission, the strategy is also an interior strategy without any external consultation procedures (Kuliesaitė, 2013).

One can observe a strong difference between the desire of a stronger cooperation between the EU and Russia in the Baltic Sea Region and the actual difficulties. This can also be seen in the EUSBSR Horizontal Action of "Neighbors". This action has the aim to connect stakeholders in the EU and neighboring countries to set up new initiatives like the 'Turku Process' and the 'Modernization Partnership for the South East Baltic Area (SEBA)'. The interesting part about this approach is the fact the Turku Process also points out that the Russian participants in the Turku process is limited as Russia

does not belong to the EU. It states that they share common goals but only the EU is responsible for the realization of the EUSBSR (City Of Turku, 2013).

The clearest sign for the limited position of Russia in the EUSBSR is the Action Plan and the distribution of the Priority Areas. Table 2 shows that Russia is not responsible for a single field and can only act through the CBSS and the ND. In 2010, the European Commission stated in its interim report on the EUSBSR that it “is neither reasonable nor realistic to expect non-Member states to sign up to an EU strategy” (European Commission, 2010b, p. 2). The following part of the EUSDR’s external dimension shows how the Commission changes its attitude towards the inclusion of non-EU countries.

6.4 Moldova and Ukraine – the European Neighborhood Policy as a link to the EU

The European Neighborhood Policy (ENP) has been set up in 2004 to limit a possible gap between the EU and the new neighbors after the great enlargement process in the same year. The ENP consists of 16 close neighbors⁷ of which for this thesis the countries of Moldova and Ukraine are relevant. Overall, one can regard the ENP as a bilateral policy between the European Union and each of the 16 countries. The ENP has the aim of “strengthening the prosperity, stability and security of all. It is based upon the values of democracy, rule of law and respect of human rights” (European Union External Action, 2013b). The ENP is additionally strengthened and amended by regional as well as multilateral co-operations like the Eastern Partnership which has been realized in 2009, the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership which has been renewed in 2008 from the former Barcelona Process, and the Black Sea Synergy, also established in 2008. These additional programs are relevant for the EU’s relationship with non-EU countries of the selected macro-regions of this thesis. The ENP enables the European Union to establish a beneficial connection to the country in question on the basis of mutual commitment to the same values. The bilateral relationships are distinctive as every country has a different level of compliance. This individual approach can also be seen in the EU supports through sector policies. The financial support between 2007 - 2013 could be counted with over € 12 billion in grant money for the realization of the

⁷ Algeria, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Egypt, Georgia, Israel, Jordan, Lebanon, Libya, Moldova, Morocco, Palestine, Syria, Tunisia and Ukraine

European Neighborhood Policy (European Commission, 2012d). It is relevant to point out that the ENP cannot officially be linked to the process of enlargement.

Due to a variation of results in the non-EU countries, the EU reviewed the ENP in 2010-2011 with a strong focus on sustainable democracy, judicial independence and limitation of corruption. The EU also stated that it will support those neighbors to a higher extent which can show a motivated and efficient attitude towards the reinforcement of democracy (European Union External Action, 2013b).

The EU plans to strengthen the cooperation with the Ukraine. With the Eastern Partnership (EaP), the neighbor could already achieve the status of a priority partner country. The cooperation bases upon the Partnership and Cooperation Agreement (PCA) of 1998 which provides the key areas of reform. The renewed ENP contains two extra documents – the Association Agreement (AA) and the Deep Comprehensive Free Trade Agreement (DCFTA). In the Council Conclusions on Ukraine the EU confirmed to sign both Documents when the neighbor takes valid actions with regard to the benchmarks which are determined in the Conclusion. The Association Agreement has the objective to reinforce political association as well as economic integration but is linked to terms of conditionality defined by the EU. In November 2013, the Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine decided to postpone arrangements to sign the Association Agreement as the necessary benchmarks are not fulfilled yet. However, the Council Conclusions on Ukraine state that “to this end, important progress has already been achieved. (Lithuanian Presidency of the Council of the EU, 2013a, p. 2)”

The relationship with the neighbor Moldova is considered to be stronger compared to the Ukraine. After the enlargement of 2004, the newly Neighbor was included in the just established ENP and could also be part of the Eastern Partnership Framework in 2009. This inclusion reinforced the relationship between the EU and Moldova and increased the Neighbor's motivation to apply for a possible membership position. Although this is not the ENP's field of responsibility, the ENP offers already the chance to start achieving EU rules and norms. Moldova also signed the Partnership and Cooperation Agreement and is currently in negotiations for the Association Agreement which also imply a Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Area. It has the aim to build up the economic, political and trade relations between Moldova and the EU. Even though the Association Agreement is not signed yet, the EU and Moldova try to strengthen transparency by sharing the content of the Agreement; “The Association Agreement is a concrete way to take advantage of the very positive dynamics in the EU-

Moldova relations. It focuses on support for core reforms, economic recovery, governance, sector cooperation and the far reaching liberalization of Moldova's trade with the EU" (European Union External Action, 2013a, p. 1). Even though this relationship seems quite strong Moldova is still not able or even willing to adopt all of the necessary EU rules and especially the realization of democracy and the compliance with human rights to the EU's satisfaction. Despite these weaknesses the Commission points out that the EU Border and Assistance Mission (EUBAM) to both countries, Moldova and Ukraine, which has been established in 2005, is in line with EU standards (EUBAM, 2013).

Ukraine and Moldova have a special geographical position as they offer the European Union a connection to the Black Sea Region. The two neighboring countries, combined with the EU countries of Bulgaria and Romania, make up the north-western half of the Black Sea shore. Despite the fact that a macro-regional strategy is just in planning for this region, it would show an overlap with the Danube Region. "Considering the actors involved in the EUSDR and its proposed projects, it is a macro-regional cooperation strategy which, in its entire major (energy, transport, and environment) as well as secondary (culture, science, knowledge etc.) goals, will provide notable benefits for the Black Sea region" (Coroban, 2011, p. 107).

6.5 The EUSDR and its External Dimension

According to Kodric (2011) the EUSDR has three central differences compared to the EUSBSR which are worth mentioning as they determine the way of the Strategy's functioning: "The incorporation of a strong external dimension through the inclusion of four candidate and potential candidate states and two ENP states, a high level of cultural and socio-economic heterogeneity with the region and a lack of pre-existing institutional structures" (Kodric, 2011, p. 15).

As the inclusion of non-EU countries in the EUSBSR has been more or less swept under the rug, the inclusion of the external dimension in the second EU strategy is regarded as a central and relevant deal. As the Danube region clearly goes beyond EU borders one can define a quarter of the Danube region is situated in the Western Balkans, Moldova and Ukraine and can count a population of approximately 115 million. Owing to historical and political circumstances the EU and non-EU states appeared from different

political and socio-economic traditions which had an influence on the development of e.g. infrastructure or the preservation of the environment (Kodric, 2011). Even though the EUSDR applies the same method of the three 'No's' as already applied to the EUSBSR, the Danube Strategy is distinctive due to its inclusion of a strong external dimension. This external dimension consists out of six non-EU countries with three accession countries (Serbia, Montenegro and Bosnia-Herzegovina), two neighborhood countries (Moldova and Ukraine) and Croatia which still was a non-EU country in the planning and implementation stage of the EUSDR and is therefore here still mentioned as a non-EU country. The Commission states clearly in its Report on the added value of macro-regional strategies that the non-EU countries of the EUSDR are involved "at an equal level, supporting integration processes and increasing cooperation in the Region" (European Commission, 2013e, p. 9). The so-called added value defined by the Commission is especially visible in the EUSDR as it has the possibility to link countries from the Western Balkans, Ukraine and Moldova stronger to the European Union. To do so, the Commission clearly states "full participation in Priority Area coordination and in Steering Groups, where support in relation to participation is receiving spatial attention. Funds have been identified from EU allocations for Danube Strategy activities by at least one non-EU countries and this is good practice for others to follow" (European Commission, 2013e, p. 9).

In the EUSDRs' Action Plan, the Priority Areas and the countries which are responsible for the particular areas have been determined (Table 3). The Action Plan has also been set up on the basis of extensive consultation procedures which did not only incorporate the relevant actors from all EU levels within the EU but also the actors from the relevant non-EU countries have been officially invited. In contrast du the EUSBSR, where the funding bases mainly upon the cohesion policy, the funding of the EUSDR is composed differently: The general funding is offered through regional, national and EU funds. In addition, roughly € 100 billion are accessible to the EU member states through structural funds. Additional and different compared to the first EU macro-regional strategy is the funding scheme of the non-EU countries; the potential EU candidates, in this case Montenegro, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Serbia and Croatia, received funding from the IPA. Croatia is now of course part of the EU framework. Moldova and Ukraine are entitled for funding under the ENPI (European Commission, 2011a). However, the financial resources of the non-EU countries are significant lower than the ones of the European Union.

Owing to the fact that no new institutions are created for each strategy, the participating states need to coordinate with priority area coordinators and national contact points. The Action Plan (Table 3) shows that always two countries are responsible for one of the eleven Priority Areas. As the overview shows, a non-EU country is always linked to an EU country and the responsibility is shared. Table 3 also displays that some areas remain in the pure hands of the EU member states. Whether one can talk from an equal partnership remains disputable. The Commission as well as the non-EU states argue that the EUSDR does not provide an equal and well-balanced framework. Even though third states are included in the strategy by giving input to the structure and accomplishment of the strategy, one has to keep in mind that the form of macro-regional strategies bases on the policies and directions of the European Union. Despite this discrepancy, the member states do agree on the fact that the states of the external dimension are included at the working level due to trans-border problems that cannot be handled without the impact of the non-EU countries. Another reason is also to promote the adoption of the *acquis* among the potential candidates of the EU. An equal partnership moreover cannot be realistic as long as the funding differences between EU and non-EU countries exist. The difference can already be observed with regard to the realization of the National Contact Points. Each member of the EUSDR is expected to form one of these points which are in need of internal capacities. The preparation of national positions does not only require time but also resources that have been planned for other projects. For non-EU countries, in particular for small or young countries this procedure can be quite challenging as e.g. administrative capacities are limited and potential candidates are often out of capacities as their primary focus lies on fulfilling the prerequisites of future EU accession (Böhme, 2013). The resource limitation can also be underlined with the number of participants in conferences etc. Even though the non-EU states are invited to all relevant conferences and information updates it was observed that these countries often did not take part. It is assumed that these countries do not have the necessary capacities (financial or personal) to attend.

Instead of an equal partnership one uses the term of a 'joint ownership'. This ownership describes the situation in which all actors have the feeling to be an equal part of a process and have a sense of ownership towards the project. While the EUSDR is still an EU Strategy and the members are not equally involved to a certain degree one can link this concept to the EUSDR: Each country has with its joint ownership the authority to

guide the development of the individual areas. In this regard one should label it a joint ownership in the individual priority area (Kodric, 2011).

In 2012, a meeting has been organized in which all Priority Area Coordinators had to present their implementation reports. Generally, one can say that the non-EU countries are strongly included in the planning and implementation of the projects. Serbia and Croatia are particularly sticking out with an active participation in the steering group meetings and Serbia was even mentioned in the Commission's Communication to act as a good contributor to the project and is strongly motivated to strengthen the cross-border programs between Romania-Serbia as well as Hungary-Serbia. These programs become more and more aligned with the EUSDR and Serbia supported these programs with €19 million for strategy-specific projects of the 2011 IPA (European Commission, 2013f). The Republic of Serbia states that it "has great significance in the future realization of the aims contained in the Joint Overall Strategy for the Danube Region. By inclusion of the Republic of Serbia in the development of the strategy and its subsequent implementation, contribution is given to the [...] improvement of bilateral and multilateral cooperation between the Republic of Serbia and all other countries in the Danube River Basin. [...] Serbia confirms its strategic commitment for its effective membership in the European Union" (Šarčević & Karanović, 2012, p. 11).

This approach shows also Serbia's strategic approach to use the idea of a macro-regional strategy to intensify the access to the European Union. This strategy has already been applied by Croatia which took active participation in the meetings and conferences to get closer to the EU framework. To use the macro-regional strategies as a strategy to ease the access to the EU is deepened in the next part.

6.6 The EU and (Potential) Candidate Countries

The main difference between the EUSAIR and the EUSBSR is first and foremost the distinct attitude towards non-EU countries. As the inclusion of Russia is rather limited, the EUSAIR "aims at accompanying the accession of the Western Balkan candidate and pre-candidate countries in the EU" (Stocchiero, 2010, p. 14).

Even though the EUSAIR is more linked to possible accession countries one has to keep in mind that the EUSDR has the same link towards the Western Balkan states as the EUSAIR. The Republic of Serbia "confirms its strategic commitment for its effective

membership in the European Union” (Stocchiero, 2010, pp. 12,13). The same accession countries are involved in both macro-regions but the actual link for accessing the European Union became more visible and dominant in the third macro-regional strategy.

While the EUSAIR is not as processed as the other two EU macro-regional strategies and is still in the planning it is of relevance to include this strategy as it is individual in its external dimension and bases on one of the main principles of macro regions: the geographical scope. This macro region shows that the countries do cooperate due to the fact that they share a common geographical factor, the sea, and that cooperation cannot without further ado simply stop at the EU borders. The macro region has an equal balance between EU and non-EU states and the non-EU states can be categorized as candidate and potential candidate countries. Therefore, the EUSAIR is often linked to the European Enlargement Policy. This part gives a very broad overview in how far the non-EU countries of the EUSAIR are already included in the accession process towards the European Union. As every accession process could fill an own thesis, this part limits itself to the basic data to show that the single non-EU countries have already an established link to the EU.

The Treaty on the European Union determines in Article 49 that any European country can submit an application for EU membership as it is in line with the democratic values of the EU. The first step for the potential new EU member states is to meet the so-called ‘Copenhagen criteria’ which specify policy areas for the new member states to fulfill before further steps for the accession can be taken (Gerhards & Hans, 2011).

It is relevant to point out, however, that the EU is also actually able to integrate new members. The countries of the Western Balkans have to meet extra conditions for membership which are laid down in the ‘Stabilization and Association Process’ (SAP) which are most of the times linked to regional cooperation. In the SAP specific ‘Stabilization and Association Agreements (SAA)’ have been set up with the Western Balkan countries which clearly imply requirements for future EU membership of the country aiming to become a EU member state (Gordon, 2013).

The non-EU countries that are included in the EUSAIR can be distinguished into two groups at different stages of the accession process: Bosnia-Herzegovina and Albania are categorized as ‘potential candidates’ as Serbia and Montenegro have already the status of ‘candidates’. During the Thessaloniki European Council Summit in 2003, all four member states received the status of ‘potential candidate’ for the EU membership. In

2005, Albania and Bosnia-Herzegovina were shifted from the policy fields of 'External Relations' towards the 'Enlargement' field. In contrast to the now 'candidates' of Serbia and Montenegro, Albania and Bosnia-Herzegovina are still in the process of the 'potential candidate countries' as the progress of the SAP is not sufficiently realized yet. Even though Albania is lacking behind in intensifying the relationship with the EU, Albania and Bosnia-Herzegovina could achieve the enforcement of some agreements like the visa facilitation. Bosnia-Herzegovina could reinforce the relation towards the EU on the basis of the Common Foreign and Security Policy and the European Security and Defense Policy as the EU deploy substantial resources in Bosnia-Herzegovina (Vachudova, 2014).

As it seems, Montenegro could be, out of the four non-EU countries of the EUSAIR, regarded as the next member state of the European Union. As the country has already applied for EU membership in 2008, in the end of 2011, the Council stated to open up negotiations in 2012. The official accession negotiation with Montenegro was launched on 29 June 2012 (European Commission, 2013a).

Serbia formally applied for EU membership in 2009. The Council opened the accession negotiations at the end of 2013. In January 2014, the 1st Intergovernmental Conference came to pass and started therefore the formal accession negotiations (European Commission, 2013b).

6.7 The EUSAIR: Only a Tool for Accessing the European Union?

Having a look at the development of the three EU macro-regional strategies it is interesting to recognize that the attitude towards the inclusion of non-EU countries changed in the course of time. The EUSAIR is a good example for showing that the balance between EU and non-EU states is equal and that macro-regional strategies become very open to the inclusion of third countries. "European future goes through Balkan and in a Union that pretends to be a model of Integration and cooperation for the construction of a peaceful area, Adriatic-Ionian Macro-Region represents an important chance to assure stability in all European and extra-EU countries" (Bassetti & Carteny, 2012, p. 61).

It seems that the external dimension is in the positive focus of this macro region and that the inclusion of these states is not even in the need to be discussed in a

controversial manner. “Not only does a macro region strengthen cooperation, facilitating consensus built on topics of common interest between territorial realities of Member States pertaining to the same area, but it contributes, with a synergic approach, to deepening the relationships with territorial realities of neighbor countries inside and outside the EU” (Mantica, 2010, p. 1). The EUSAIR is additionally considered of providing a central added value by signaling the Western Balkan countries new attention and “concrete collaboration perspective [...] towards their future adhesion to the European home” (Stocchiero, 2011, p. 5). The EU Strategy for the Adriatic-Ionian Region appears to have a strong external dimension that should become an internal EU one in the future.

It seems that the EUSAIR has only been proposed as a strategic approach for accessing the European Union more easily. As it is not negligible that this thought underlines the process of the strategy, the inclusion of parts of the Western Balkan countries has also other intentions. First of all, the geographical aspect that combines all eight countries of the macro region, the sea. Before the EUSAIR came into considerations, the Adriatic Ionian Nations have already shown their common interest to face the region’s challenges together. Since 2007 one can count approximately 135 projects of cooperation in the fields of marine and maritime. The Region recognized early the potential of the Sea to create economic growth as well as necessary jobs (EU Delegation to Albania, 2014). To strengthen this approach the Maritime Strategy for the Adriatic and Ionian Seas has been adopted by the Commission in 2012 and will also be a central integrated part of the EUSAIR. The Maritime Strategy distinguishes four main areas:

1. Marine and maritime growth
2. Connection the region
3. Environmental quality
4. Tourism

Even though the final Priority Areas of the EUSAIR are not determined yet, the Commission states that the future Action Plan will base upon these four pillars. In the Conclusion of the Integrated Maritime Policy in the end of 2011, the Council promised its support for the “ongoing work of Adriatic and Ionian Member States to enhance maritime cooperation with non-EU neighbors in the area within in the framework of a macro-regional strategy” (European Council, 2011a, p. 6). Already in the Maritime

Strategy for the Adriatic-Ionian Strategy one can observe how non-EU countries are linked to apply to the EU framework: “Ensuring good environmental and ecological status of the marine and coastal environment by 2020 in line with the relevant EU *aquis*” (European Commission, 2012a, p. 8). The Commission is persuaded that this maritime strategy has the possibility to support all participating countries to contribute to the objectives of Europe 2020 and reinforces European integration in a flexible and inclusive way. The stakeholder consultation process took place from September to December 2013 and supported the assumption of an already connected region without highlighting extra inclusion of non-EU countries. Two countries, always consisting of an EU and a non-EU country were in charge for coordinating and structuring the four pillars (Table 4). From October 2013 till January 2014 an additional general online public consultation has been brought to life to strengthen an overall participation for the forming of the EUSAIR. “Proper involvement of local authorities keeps citizens close to the accession process and informed about its concrete advantages” (Bresso, 2011, p. 2). None of the other strategies had such a high bottom-up involvement. The distribution between EU and non-EU countries is not particularly different. The findings of the consultation process are presented at a Stakeholder Conference of the EU Strategy for the Adriatic and Ionian Region in the beginning of February 2014 by the Greek presidency of the EU Council and the Commission. Johannes Hahn, the European Commissioner for Regional Policy, called the new strategy as ‘tailor made’ and pointed out the enormous bottom-up driven consultation process. He stresses the importance of the different states of the strategy and adds that “the strategy will also contribute to the further integration of the Western Balkans by offering the chance to work alongside neighbors on areas of common interest. This is Europe’s third macro-regional strategy and we have learnt the importance of political commitment and of participating countries focusing their effort in the macro-regional approach. This will be key to this Strategy’s success” (Hahn, 2014, p. 1). The results of the consultation process have an impact on the forming of the Strategy which will be adopted by the Commission in the form of a Communication and an Action Plan in the first half of 2014. These documents will be submitted to the EU Council afterwards. After the adoption of the Communication and the Strategy, the official implementation can commence (European Commission, 2013c).

According to Cugusi (2013) “the binding together of the Adriatic regions and negotiations between each other is even more important than before. [...] The partners

in the strategy should try to think as a network instead of thinking for themselves as separate regions” (Cugusi, 2013, p. 9). This quotation can be applied to EU or non-EU strategies: for a successful implementation of the EUSAIR every country, despite of their status, needs to cooperate equally to realize the strategy in a sufficient manner.

6.8 Conclusion

Even though the first macro-regional strategy includes Russia as a non-EU country, the planning and implementation part of the strategy show that Russia can only act through pre-established transnational institutions like the CBSS and the ND. This case is a good example to show that it is not the norm that countries are willing to cooperate with the EU due to beneficial outcomes. In this case, Russia is also reluctant to reinforce the cooperation with the EU in a strategy that bases primarily upon EU policies. Russia takes different measures to counterbalance the approach of the EUSBSR to limit the dominant position of the EU. Although it is argued that the EU is also not willing to include Russia, one has also to consider the dimensions of this actor. Compared to the other non-EU countries involved in the macro regions, a level of valid comparison cannot be drawn as Russia is on the one hand, not that dependent on the EU and has on the other hand, different geographical and political proportions. The question remains whether the official inclusion of Russia would benefit the EUSBSR or complicate the whole strategy due to possible power games.

The EUSDR in contrast, officially includes the non-EU countries as it recognizes that an efficient realization of the EUSDR can only be achieved by the inclusion of all relevant states. However, even though the third countries are included in the Priority Areas, they have to share the responsibilities with the EU countries. Through all strategies one gets aware that they always remain an internal EU strategy, despite the number of non-EU countries. Looking at the external dimension of the EUSDR and the EUSAIR one can see that the Western Balkan states, Croatia included, are included in both strategies. Although the focus lies upon different geographical factors it is questionable whether the non-EU countries can manage the administrative and financial functions of these strategies. The case of Croatia shows that the country can also serve as a link for both strategies and can therefore strengthen possible future cooperation schemes. It is interesting to observe, that while the same number of non-EU states is

present in the strategies, the EUSAIR can present a stronger bottom-up approach and a higher participation of the third countries. An explanation for this circumstance could be the stronger inclusion of the non-EU countries in the EUSAIR and the strong cooperation that existed already before the EUSAIR came into discussion.

One main critique of the EUSAIR is the possible threat and the splitting up of the Mediterranean area. The area could be divided into three hypothetical macro-regional districts: the Adriatic-Ionian, the Eastern and the Western Mediterranean. With the realization of the EUSAIR one could argue that the Adriatic-Ionian Region tends more towards the EU and leaves a gap between the other Mediterranean parts.

The following conclusion gives an overview of the most important findings and links it to the concept of differentiated integration. It tries to give arguments for answering the central research question and will point out possible topics for further research.

7. ANALYTICAL CONCLUSION AND GENERAL REMARKS

The integration process of the European Union is often linked to the so-called ‘bicycle theory’ by stating that “if the EU doesn’t keep moving forward toward an ever closer union you will fall off the bicycle” (Moravcsik, 2012, p. 55). This picture implies an ongoing EU of 28 member states, riding on one bike towards an ever closer Union. Adding the development of macro-regional strategies to this picture, one can assume that one bike is not enough anymore as the integration goals seem to differ. A bicycle will be exchanged with a number of tandems, differing in their ‘seat composition’. This picture brings us back to the central research question of this thesis: *To what extent can macro-regional strategies (MRS) be regarded as a new form of differentiated integration?*

The conclusion starts with general findings of the relationship between differentiated integration and macro-regional strategies. After presenting these outcomes a detailed analysis of the link between differentiated integration and the macro-region’s external dimension is given. The conclusion also offers options for further research possibilities. Differentiated integration is not a new appearance in the development of the European Union but it regained attention with the establishment of EU macro-regional strategies. A new form of this flexible integration could be identified which has no legal foundation and varies in its geographical scope. Differentiated integration describes a concept that only includes a limited number of states. This phenomenon can also be observed with the concept of macro-regional strategies that also vary in the number of member states. The composition of states concerns mainly a significantly lower number compared to the whole European Union, in some cases with additional non-EU countries.

By comparing these two approaches it is relevant to point out that the integration theory of differentiation can be related to regionalization. The argumentation bases on the simple fact that in the case of regionalization and differentiation, states are geographically close and have common values and often a common historical past. These similarities do not have to be of interest for the rest of the European Union and certain clusters of countries form therefore individual regions. Furthermore, these regions have to be situated within the EU framework due to the engaged policies. While it is challenging to clarify the precise legal span of differentiated integration due to the

fact that it can reach from formal to informal arrangements, compared with the macro-regional strategy, differentiated integration could obtain a substantial treaty foundation in the course of time. Thus, this integration bases especially after the Treaty of Maastricht on soft as well as on hard laws as macro-regional strategies function solely on soft law. Taking into account the institutional dimension of differentiated integration, member states play the central role. Supranational institutions do have certain influences but especially issues with regard to community law are initially issued by the member states. In contrast is the institutional dimension of a macro region. The EUSBSR is a good example to show that the idea of macro-regional strategies can be initiated from within supranational institutions, especially from the European Parliament, taken over by the Commission at a later stage.

Both approaches, however, found a way to increase EU policy implementation. As differentiated integration covers policy areas like the European Monetary Union, the strategies can also have an influence on the implementation of EU policies. Even though it is stated that macro-regional strategies are rather law-shaping than law-making, the strategies can contribute to a stronger implementation of EU legislation in the particular member states and can even push non-EU countries to commit to these legislations. The EU Water Framework Directive or the Marine Strategy Framework Directive are examples supporting this approach.

To investigate the actual link between macro-regional strategies and differentiated integration in more depth, the method of a comparative case study analysis has been applied with the cases of the EUSBSR, EUSDR and the EUSAIR. Certain dimensions have been defined to find a common pattern for analysis. The analysis shows that the three cases are similar in most of the examined issues and just differ slightly in the following matters:

1. Varying number of states
2. Governance structure: Top-down vs. bottom-up approach
3. Pre-institutional co-operational structures
4. Different levels of third states' inclusion

The case studies show that the variations of geopolitical constellations - old and new member states, non-EU states, pre-existing intergovernmental institutions and the involvement of sub-national authorities within the different macro regions - can be an

indication for differences between the macro-regional strategies, especially in their development structures.

Although some differences could be identified with respect to the case studies, the similarities outweighed the differences. Therefore, it is possible to apply them in a combined fashion to the six pre-defined dimensions of differentiated integration which were explained in the theoretical chapter. The macro-regional strategies could all be linked to these dimensions, which underline the relation between macro-regional strategies and differentiated integration. However, the last dimension with regard to the involvement of third countries cannot be answered in a satisfactory way. The dichotomous concept leaves room for further investigations. Hence, the thesis put an extra focus upon the external dimension of the three case studies and analyzed the different approaches toward the inclusion of non-EU countries within the macro-regional strategies:

First of all, the number of non-EU countries varies. As the EUSBSR only includes one non-EU country, the EUSDR comprises of six third countries and the EUSAIR has a balance between four non-EU countries and four EU member states.

Secondly, not only does the number of non-EU states show a discrepancy but also the scope of participation. Russia has the most limited position as a non-EU country in the macro-regional strategy design. The internal EU character of the macro-regional strategies has, compared to the other two strategies, particularly highlighted by the European Union in the case of the EUSBSR. While the overall level of Russia's participation is still disputable, the EU institutions as well as the member states agreed on cooperation through already established international institutions like the ND or the CBSS. Russia cannot be categorized as a primary implementer of the strategy but has to be included to resolve common problems. The relation between the EU and Russia with regard to the EUSBSR seems at first sight dominated by the European Union. However, Russia did hardly show any motivation to become a stronger involved actor in this strategy. Due to the fact that the EU character of the strategy is dominant, Russia's attention towards the strategy is rather limited. Russia can access the strategy through e.g. the ND and has limited access to those priority areas which the institutions are allocated to. Russia's inclusion is also quite reduced as it has no representative for a NCP that could mediate between the Commission, PACs and Russia's stakeholders.

Whereas the scope of Russia's participation is rather unclear, the purpose towards the third countries of the EUSDR and the EUSAIR bases on a more solid ground. The

Commission offers the non-EU countries the participation at an equal level and includes them at an early planning stage of the strategies. In contrast to Russia, these third countries are motivated to be included in the strategies as they hope to get closer to their goal of becoming a future member state of the European Union. The relationship between the EU and the non-EU countries is therefore mutually motivated as both sides can benefit from the strategic advantages of cooperating.

A **third** relevant issue with regard to the inclusion of third countries is the different pre-relation to the EU. As the relation between Russia and the EU has already been discussed, the non-EU countries of the other strategies can be divided into (potential) accession countries and states which are linked to the ENP. The former ones have a direct and motivated interest in the realization of the macro-regional states as they try to reinforce their chance of becoming a new member state of the EU. The countries which are linked to the ENP have a rather mild attitude towards the strategies as their future goal is further away and more difficult to achieve. This segregation can be linked to the variable geometric of differentiated integration. Countries of the ENP and candidate countries as well as potential candidate countries can be situated in different concentric circles which symbolize a different degree of integration. Candidate countries are situated in a closer circle, potential candidate countries are located around this former circle and countries linked to the ENP are positioned at a circle further away. This shows that even though countries belong to the same macro region, they are segregated into different circles. Taking this approach into consideration one can point out that differentiated integration does not only occur within the EU and between different macro regions but also within a single macro region. Differentiated integration is therefore not only an internal issue for the EU; it can also shape external outcomes. The positioning of the countries in different circles can be determined either by the EU or different member states or the non-EU countries in question. The EU in general determines the general status of the third countries under the prerequisite that the countries are willing to begin this relationship. The non-EU countries have to fulfill the predefined conditions to remain or even to strengthen the link to the EU. Owing to the fact that not every country has the same starting position, differences between accession and ENP countries exist. In addition, the motivation of the non-EU countries can also vary and different levels of participation develop.

The **fourth** matter can be linked to this argumentation. As shown, every country has a different affiliation towards the EU and not all of the set relations are determined by the

EU as the example of Russia illustrates. The set-up of macro-regional strategies has a tendency to support a flexible attitude towards the implementation of the strategies. Each country has the possibility to decide whether it wants to participate, to what extent and in what kind of timeframe it wants to participate as no hard legislation structures put pressure on the states. Consequently a pick and choose mentality develops which supports the *à la carte* approach of differentiated integration. As Russia decided to be only partly involved in the EUSBSR, other non-EU countries chose to take part in certain priority areas. No binding time framework has been established. This approach cannot only be linked to the non-EU states as the EU member states have even a stronger position to decide in which policy area they want to play a stronger role. This development underlines the argument that differentiated integration can also occur within one macro-region.

Fifth, it has to be added that while a pick and choose mentality exists, the participation level of non-EU countries can also vary due to available resources. The EUSDR and the EUSAIR show a number of non-EU countries that are situated in both macro regions. On the one hand it could strengthen the interconnectedness of the different macro regions but on the other hand, it can also lead to an overburden for some countries. In particular the non-EU countries do often not have the resources (financial, human resources) or even the knowledge to follow the EU procedures or realize the strategies. In this regard, the EUSBSR has an advantage because Russia is only included in one macro region and additionally only in a limited position.

A **sixth** aspect is the pre-established and still existing cooperation of the states involved in the macro regions. The EU can rely on different networks of institutions that have been established prior to the macro-regional strategies and can therefore offer a good basis for cooperation. As the EUSBSR can be supported by the CBSS, ND or HELCOM, the EUSAIR has a strong cooperation framework on the basis of the AII. These well-established cooperational structures cannot be found in the Danube Region. Although the intergovernmental organization of the Danube Commission has been established, it could not create a sufficient foundation for future cooperation. The EUSAIR is a good example to show that while a high number of non- EU countries are involved within this strategy, the cooperation between these states is stronger and more efficient as it rests on a long way of cooperative structures.

A **seventh** argument is the dominant role of the rotating presidency of the EU Council. Member states of the particular macro region used its presidency position to promote

the macro-regional strategy they are involved in. Macro regions with a high number of non-EU countries have a limited chance to strengthen their macro region at the EU level and implementation and realization phases would gain less attention. Whereas the executive body of the AII has also a rotating presidency system of the eight participating states, the strong link towards the whole EU is missing.

This overview shows that an added value for macro-regional strategies can be gained from the non-EU countries as they can benefit from a closer link towards the EU. One can argue that macro regions consisting partly out of non-EU countries will keep up the strategy as they have the intention in a long term achievement, an EU membership. As the Eastern and Southern part of Europe have more (potential) candidate countries an unbalance can be assumed. Nevertheless, it has to be differentiated between the (potential) candidate countries and countries under the realm of ENP have to be differentiated.

To intensively conduct research upon this possible phenomenon a longitudinal study should be conducted. In the long run, with the possible realization of the Atlantic Arc macro region, it might be interesting to have a macro region solely consisting of EU member states. This macro region could then serve as a counterbalance and a comparative study could be carried out with regard to the impacts of non-EU countries in macro regions vs. pure EU macro regions. In general, macro-regional strategies have to be observed over a longer time to analyze the impacts of the regions as an EU internal strategy. The actual achievements of the different macro regions could be better analyzed and a more individual focus on single countries should be taken. Does for example the political instability in the Ukraine of 2014 have an impact on the general development of the EUSDR? Is the soft power structure of the strategies actually sufficient enough to keep the member states motivated? Would the fall-back of single member states influence the whole region? Even though one could give theoretical considerations about these issues, only on the basis of the degree of fulfillment of the Action Plans in the long run conclusions can be drawn.

While the macro-regional development is still in the beginning, an unbalance or even a multi-speed Europe can develop and though the EUSAIR would add a more southern focus, a split through the EU can be observed. To counterbalance this development many new proposals have been initiated to set up macro-regional strategies in the Western and Northern Part of the EU. This development might create artificial areas within the EU as the initial idea of macro regions has been to form cooperations to cope

with common challenges, mainly in the environmental realm. Member states should see the need to cooperate and not only establish macro regions to be in a competitive advantage. The functioning of a strategy depends on the political willingness of the involved governments and stakeholders. Just being part of a macro region to compensate the Eastern macro-regionalization does not promise to be successful. Additionally one has to keep in mind the quite fragile structure of the strategies. The '3 No' governance structure can be on the one hand regarded as quite flexible and easy to implement but on the other hand not binding at all. The EU's plan has been to keep a clear structure and not to establish any additional institutions. In line with this argumentation one can put it quite simple: if the case arises that a macro-regional strategy does not work out or is not backed up sufficiently enough by its member states, a macro region could diminish without leaving any institutions or financial burden behind.

Looking at the geographical development of the macro regions, the macro-regionalization appears primarily in Central and Northern Europe. With the newest strategy, the EUSAIR, regionalization shifts towards the South. Even though strategies are planned for the Western part of the EU, no realistic approaches have been undertaken. The three discussed strategies can already show the double function of some states in different macro-regions. Germany creates a special case as different German federal states are included in either the EUSBSR or the EUSDR. These dominant regions can additionally set up their own sub-national foreign policy and can develop towards a dominant player at a macro-regional scale. Germany can therefore serve as a good basis for being a central point for reinforcing the cooperation in the EU's Eastern part.

Whether multi-speed Europe is actually the correct term to use is debatable. Although it is clear that different integration speeds do exist due to the establishment of macro-regional strategies, the term of multi-speed Europe can be a little bit confusing. This term is related to the fact that other member states can join the macro region later on when they are willing to or generally able to. As every state can decide individually whether it is willing to take part, not every state has the possibility to actually join the macro region as it is limited to the states that are actually linked to the particular scope of the macro region. Thus, the term in itself can be argued as discussable but the fact that the EU moves at different speeds seems to be apparent. The establishment of macro regions has resulted into tensions within the EU and a so-called macro-regional fever

has developed to set up as many strategies as possible to respond to the spatial diversity of the EU.

Not only the development of macro-regional strategies but also the focus on the inclusion of non-EU countries shows that the comeback of differentiated integration in the EU is without question. The traditional theories of European integration focus on an one-dimensional and unanimous integration process. Even though e.g. neo-functionalism can explain an alternative integration process with regard to spill-over effects, the growing diversity in the EU is mainly ignored by the theories. Each of the theory adds one piece to the puzzle, as for example constructivism does not only consider the national interest but how integration can be influenced by identities and norms. The development of macro regions and the link to differentiated integration shows clearly that the EU's motto 'United in diversity' has to become a central thought of current integration processes. As the thesis shows, more non-EU countries with different backgrounds would like to join the EU. The possible inclusion supports the argument of a diverse EU and a shift from traditional integration theories towards a more flexible one has to occur to avoid a standstill. This does not necessarily mean that the traditional theories are not valid in their existence but rather that they have to be amended to the growing and changing EU. To realize this shift an overall standardization has to be reduced as not every member state has to get involved in the overall EU framework and synergies between groups of states should be strengthened. Although the principle of diversity is often linked to a problematic approach, the strength of this concept should be crystallized. Diversity can provide advantages as it makes available different solutions and methods to form individual and tailor-made solutions. Therefore cooperation partners should not solely determine the needs but e.g. geographical needs should bring together partners/countries to cooperate, as it the case in macro-regional strategies. It is without question that different integration approaches in the EU will limit the initial idea of unanimity but it supports a new movement in the slowed-down EU integration process.

Coming back to the beginning of the conclusion, this research suggests an amendment of the bicycle approach. As macro-regional strategies would be in the need of more than one bicycle, the inclusion of non-EU countries could be symbolized by extra training wheels. These wheels support the bicycle in general, offer more stabilization but at the same time can slow down the full capacity of an internal EU bike as the overall knowledge of riding a bike is still missing.

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