



Radboud University Nijmegen

## The EU macro-regional strategies: Do they bring something new?

The added value of the EU macro- regional strategies in the Baltic Sea and the Danube region and the arguments for a possible or not combination with the European Transnational Territorial Cooperation Programmes (INTERREG B)

Master thesis in European Spatial and Environmental Planning (ESEP)  
Nijmegen School of Management

Maria Toptsidou

Date of submission: 2<sup>nd</sup> of April, 2013

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*To my parents, for all their love and support*

*"Man's endeavour and political aspiration is to try to develop a balanced territory"*

Jacques Delors, President of the European Commission (1985-1995)

## Acknowledgements

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Returning home and looking back at all this process of writing a master thesis, I realised that the time has passed incredibly fast. During the last months I had the chance to meet several people and see different places, but first and foremost to learn. Learn from the practical perspective. This master thesis is both a combination of a thorough learning procedure throughout a master programme as well as of a unique experience arising from the field study which took place in two countries. In spite of the relatively short time period of the actual research, my engagement with it started a long time before, during the preparation period, before leaving the Netherlands for the new adventures. In any case conducting a research is an ambitious field which requires devotion and concentration. It includes many hours of work and sacrifice in order to get the result you opt for. Despite the fact that it has been a tiring, stressful and time-consuming procedure, it does not detract the fact that it is a valuable learning and exciting experience. Being a master student at the Radboud University Nijmegen, following the master specialisation "European Spatial and Environmental Planning", I understood from the first months of studying that Radboud is a university that gives chances to its students. Having received a scholarship from the Radboud Honours Academy, due to my over averaged grades throughout my studies, I had the opportunity to do a research project on a topic of my choice. Always inspired by the unique environment of the European Union and especially of its Regional and Cohesion Policy, I was always intrigued by issues dealing with the European transnational cooperation. Inspired by the quote of Jacques Delors cited in the beginning, I chose the topic of the currently emerging transnational cooperation form of the macro-regional strategies. The topic would definitely fit to the ambitious character of the programme. The idea was to spend two months abroad, in order to personally contact people that are involved in this cooperation form and observe the way that they function in the region. As a result, there was a month spent in Vienna, Austria, where the Danube macro-regional strategy was researched, and one month in Karlskrona, Sweden, for the Baltic Sea macro-regional strategy. This chance, the long time and intense engagement in this research project, inspired me to focus on a similar topic for my master thesis.

Certainly all this effort would have not been realised without the help and support of some people, who were there throughout all this process. First and foremost, I would like to thank my supervisor, Dr Stefanie Dühr, not only for her academic assistance in putting all this idea into praxis, but also for all her support and courage during all our long meetings, which gave me faith and stubbornness to continue, despite any difficulties. Thank you for making me feel sure about myself from the first times we talked before my admission to the masters programme until today. In addition, I would like to give special thanks to my supervisors in the two universities I was hosted, Dr Beatrix Haselsberger, from the Technical University in Vienna, and Prof. Jan- Evert Nilsson, from the Blekinge Institute of Technology in Karlskrona, for our long discussions and talks, as well as their support and friendship.

I would also like to thank all the people who so warmly welcomed me at the two hosted universities, for their valuable help and for making my stay as pleasant as possible. Moreover, I would also like to thank all the twenty seven interviewees that took part in the research, who despite their busy agendas and schedules dedicated some time for me and whose information are of the most importance for the research; nothing would have been possible without them. Last but certainly not least, I would like to thank the Radboud University and the Radboud Honours Academy for trusting me for and for giving me this great chance and opportunity, without which this research would also not have been started. Concluding, I would like to give special thanks to some friends who served as a second family for me, not only during the past months, but during all my time in Nijmegen. A big thank you to each and every member of the "Vossenveld family" for being there showing me that there is always a bright side of life to see on.

I am dedicating this master thesis to my parents, as a least thank you for always being there, despite any distance. Thank you for everything.

Maria Toptsidou,

Thessaloniki, March 2013

## Summary

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Under the framework of the European Cohesion Policy, the transnational cooperation in Europe managed to address common issues and tackle common challenges in order to promote integration and growth along its regions. Until today, several forms of transnational cooperation already exist in the EU, including EU funding under the 'INTERREG' programmes across large coherent space. Apart from this, sub-regional agreements on national level among nation states have also been developed. This paper discusses the emergence of a new transnational cooperation form : The European Union macro-regional strategies, prepared for two transnational areas: The Baltic Sea and the Danube river. After a brief introduction to the EU cohesion policy and transnational cooperation, the emergence of the macro-regional strategies will be presented, while their similarities and differences with the transnational INTERREG programmes will be distinguished. A suitable theoretical perspective and methodological approach will be set out. The proposed research seeks to examine the added value of the EU macro-regional strategies, and suggest arguments that may support or prevent a future possible combination with the EU funding programmes for transnational territorial cooperation (INTERREG), *vis-à-vis* the future Cohesion Policy.

## Abbreviations

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ARGE: Arbeitsgemeinschaft Donauländer

CEI: Central Europe Initiative

CoDCR: Council of the Danube cities and regions

EU: European Union

EUMRS European Union Macro-Regional Strategies

EUSBSR European Union Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region

EUSDR: European Union Strategy for the Danube Region

HELCOM: Helsinki Convention

ICPDR: International Commission for the Protection of the Danube River

(EU)MRS: (EU) Macro-regional strategies

ND: Northern Dimension

NEI: Northern European Initiative

SECI: Central European Cooperation Initiative

VASAB: Visions and Strategies around the Baltic Sea

WISE Group: Visegrad group

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## Introduction

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The idea of creating a European Community, where nation states will commit upon peace and mutual compromises, has already been from the beginning very ambitious and promising. Uniting under the same umbrella different countries which for a long time had suffered wars and disasters in order to achieve long term peace, stability and growth was not an easy task. The late '40s have been marked by the end of the World War II, which has inevitably brought major consequences, causing not only catastrophic property damages, but also resulting in estranging any human relationships of the neighbouring countries. In order to overcome the horrors and devastating consequences of this war, and wishing to avoid future wars and conflicts between the nations of Europe, the founding fathers of the European Community envisaged a better future for the coming generations, opting for peace and European Integration among them. "Europe will not be made all at once, or according to a single plan. It will be built through concrete achievements which first create a de facto solidarity", as Robert Schuman, one of the inspirers of the European Community, declared in the famous *Schuman Declaration* (9 May 1950), the starting point for the Steel and Coal Community and later on for the European Community. Through several stages, changes and Treaties, the initial Steel and Coal Community (1950) which united six countries, transformed in 1959 into the European Economic Community to become, through the Maastricht Treaty (1992), the until today form of European Union. This unique organisation did not only manage to achieve peace and stability for its member states, but also economic prosperity and growth for more than 50 years, for all which effort it was awarded with the Peace Nobel Prize (2012).

However, the European Union has not only been about peace-keeping. Throughout its history it managed to introduce several policies in order to achieve development, economic growth, better connection among the member states so as to promote the integration of its member states and create equal opportunities for them. One characteristic example of these policies has been the European Regional Policy, which aims at creating a balanced and developed territory within the European Union. After following several waves of enlargement during the years, the European Union is comprised nowadays of 27 member states with different political, economic and cultural backgrounds. With the objective of reducing any economic, social and territorial disparities that may occur across its borders and therefore to promote integration and a balanced territory, the EU has established a regional policy and opted for more cooperation among its member states and among different governmental levels. This Regional Policy, often also referred to as Cohesion Policy, has mainly been expressed through the *cooperation*, which is necessary for development. The concept of cooperation has certainly not been new in the European area, regarding that after the World War II some nation states through different agreements have tried to establish cooperation relations with each other. This has mainly taken the form of cross-border cooperation, i.e. cooperation of regions of

directly neighbouring countries, initiated by local politicians and promoting common interests (EC Regional Policy website). A characteristic example is the creation of the first Eugenio between the Dutch and German borders in 1958, an example followed later by other countries, too. Nevertheless, the European Union managed to bring a more integrated approach in the European cooperation and launched several initiatives. This master thesis deals with one form of cooperation in Europe, namely with the transnational cooperation, i.e. the one that deals with the cooperation among national, regional and local authorities and “across large multi-national spaces” (Dühr, et al, 2010, pg.30), in order to “promote integration through the formation of large groups of European regions (EC, Regional Policy, Inforegio). The transnational cooperation has also passed through several changes and still does, adapting each time to the overall goals of the EU for the next years.

From the stage of national agreements between member states for the promotion of cooperation, to the main EU initiative of the INTERREG<sup>1</sup> programmes, which funded projects on transnational cooperation, and to the most recent EU macro-regional strategies, the transnational cooperation is still an interesting and current topic to explore. What has been fascinating about this topic and constitutes the main reason for its choice is that actually the discussions around it have never ceased to keep the interest high, not only of the European Union and member states, but also of the academic community. Taking the available literature into account, we consider that within the current policy debates on the future of EU Cohesion Policy, macro-regional strategies and their relationship to INTERREG funding programmes for transnational cooperation are thus an innovative, interesting and challenging topic to explore. To this, is added the relatively limited literature, which makes the topic even more triggering to be researched. Moreover, the fact that the macro-regional strategies are different, as are differently constructed, having for example different geographical and governance structures in relation to the so far existing INTERREG programmes, it would be interesting to see their added value in relation to the INTERREG programmes. Another intriguing fact for this research is to observe in how far the macro-regional strategies may play a more active role to the current Territorial Cohesion objective and whether there is potential of any reforms to be observed, as for example an interlinkage with the INTERREG B programmes or a possible combination of the two forms. Together with the fact that it constitutes a current topic that will possibly play a crucial in the future cooperation initiatives of the member states and the European Union, comprise the reasons for choosing this topic for this research project. The macro-regional strategies have managed to create a 'macro-regional fever', stimulate an interest in many countries who wish to be part of a macro-region in the future, while since their creation they gain day by day more and more support from the high national political levels, as well as from the European

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<sup>1</sup> After the Lisbon Treaty the INTERREG B Programmes are the European Territorial Cooperation Objective officially, however they are still often referred to as INTERREG B. In this thesis we use the term European Transnational Territorial Cooperation Programmes, to specify the type of cooperation. However, often they are still referred to as INTERREG B

institutions. All these raise questions on the future role of the existing transnational cooperation and constitute the topic and the relation of the two forms challenging, regarding that we can already observe a gradual change in the transnational cooperation: From now on, and especially after the Lisbon Treaty, "territory matters" and this is what the new cooperation form of the macro-regional strategies has come to show.

### **Scientific and societal relevance**

When we talk about the *scientific relevance*, we refer in our case, in the contribution of this research to theories and practices around the European transnational cooperation. The initial thought was to look deeper in this new form of transnational cooperation, the EU macro-regional strategies, in the field of their added value and their relation to the existing transnational cooperation forms, as the INTERREG B programmes, since the so far available literature on this topic is not so broad. Therefore, the master thesis aims at contributing in showing the interest in the relation of these cooperation forms and be an incentive for further discussions on the topic. Moreover, the macro-regional strategies are an emerging topic, which has raised awareness in the representatives of the member states the last years, regarding that more and more countries wish to be part of a macro-regional strategy. In addition, the changes that occur day by day in the European Union as for example the ongoing economic crisis that demand more strategic, coherent and visible cooperation projects, raises the question on whether all these different cooperation forms are needed and what they have to offer or how can be better applied. Last but not least, it might be a useful piece of research for the interest of the stakeholders in the transnational cooperation, for the actors in the EU macro-regional strategies, spatial planners and policy makers, but also for citizens and other students, which would be keen on engaging in a further research of the topic in the future. For all these, the EU macro-regional strategies, constitute a challenging approach to investigate.

As *societal relevance* is in this case, meant the possible contribution of the research to the solution of real life planning issues, on the effects that it could have on the everyday social life of people. The European transnational cooperation is an issue that is close to the European citizens as no other, since it plays an important role not only for the member-states as such, but also for the citizens of the Union, in general. The projects undertaken under the European INTERREG funding affect the everyday of each European citizen, dealing with issues as research and innovation, the environmental protection, safety and as a result, the living conditions of the citizens, their life quality and standards, their network building and well-being. Taking the macro-regional strategies into account, we could say that the transnational cooperation in this case, has an even more important reflection: The cooperation emerges from the member-states themselves, constituting a states' initiative, which was approved and appraised by the EU. The struggle for more European territorial

cohesion, for minimising the social and economic differences between the member states and for more cooperation is a topic that affects everyone. Representatives of the people take part in both cooperation forms, are responsible for the decisions they take for their regions, as well as for the actions that are necessary to be taken.

### **The aim of the thesis: The main research question**

As already mentioned the EU macro-regional strategies are new upcoming phenomenon, being on the scene only the last four years, due to which the available literature on the topic is not endless. Apart from the official EU documents, the academic community has not focused on the added value of the EU macro-regional strategies, let alone their relation to other transnational cooperation forms, such as the INTERREG B programmes. Through this research we will try to look on the added value of the EU macro-regional strategies to the existing transnational cooperation forms. For this, we take as example the two existing macro-regional strategies, the Baltic Sea macro-region and the Danube macro-region as case studies and the respective INTERREG B programmes. From all the above and through an extensive desk study, the following main research question has arisen:

**How can the added value of the two EU macro-regional strategies in relation to the existing transnational territorial cooperation programmes in these regions in Europe be conceptualised and what are their similarities and differences that may raise arguments supporting or preventing a possible combination in the future?**

This research question has the following research sub-questions:

#### **1) How can transnational cooperation in Europe be conceptualised?**

The first research sub-question will be answered through a review of documents relevant to the topic. After presenting the evolution of the INTERREG B programmes and of other transnational cooperation forms, the EU macro-regional strategies initiation will also be described with a focus in the two regions at hand. This section will be set out in the first chapter and will serve as a guide for the rest of the thesis.

#### **2) What are the similarities and differences of the different cooperation forms in these two regions?**

Having described the evolution of the different cooperation forms and defined them, the similarities and differences of them will be formulated in the theoretical chapter, where also the conceptual framework will be built (*Chapter 2*). The term of 'added value' will also be defined here and therefore conceptualised in this

content.

**3) What is the added value of the EU macro-regional strategies to the existing transnational cooperation forms in the Baltic Sea and the Danube region?**

The third research sub-question will be answered both through the desk study and the interviews undertaken during the research from stakeholders in the EU macro-regional strategies. Although the previous chapters talked about the sub-regional cooperation as well, the empirical results focus on the actors' views on the INTERREG EUMRS.

**4) What are the arguments for and against a future combination of the different cooperation forms?**

Through a deductive reasoning from the previous sub-questions and after analysing the interview data, we will try to identify any arguments supporting or not a future combination of the two transnational cooperation forms, according to the opinions of the interview partners.

### **Structure of the master thesis**

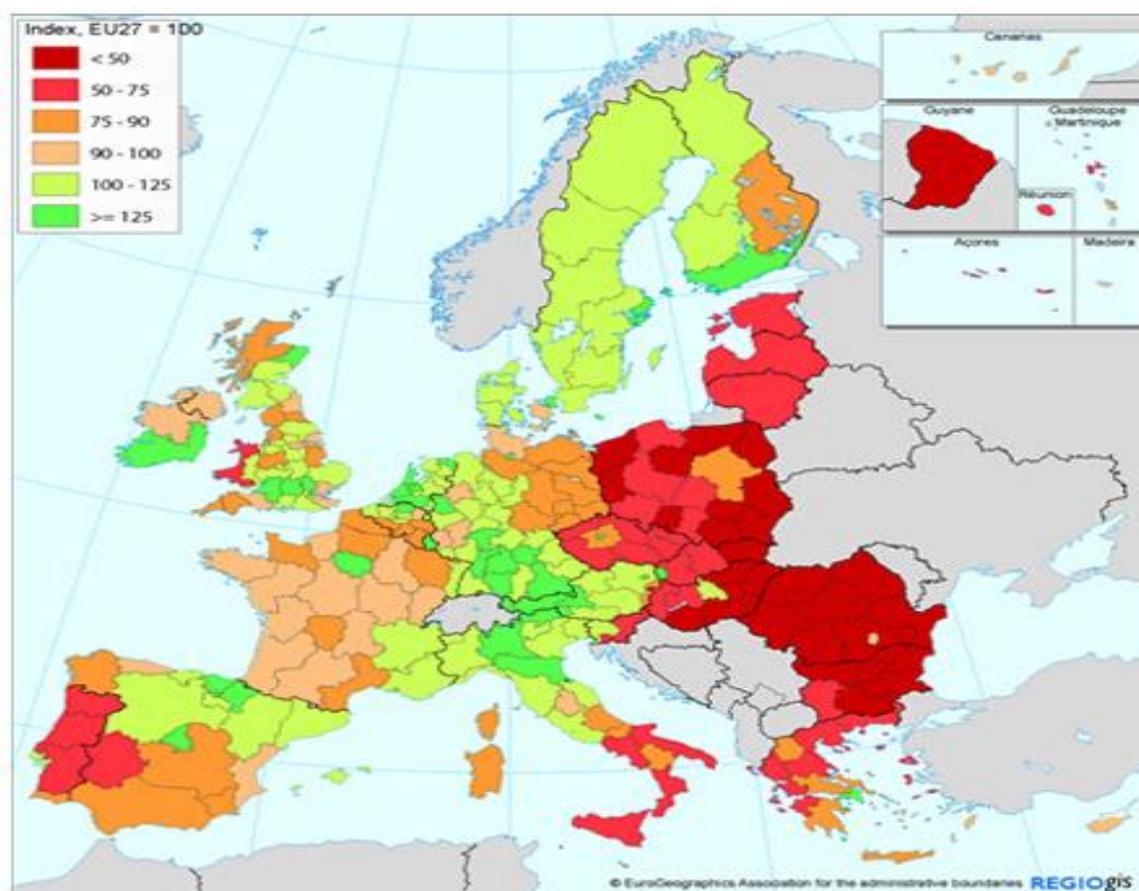
For a better overview of the contents of this master thesis, the outline has been decided as follows. After the introductory chapter, which mainly served in putting the reader in the general concept of the topic in hand, the scope and the importance of the research, four more chapter will follow. The first chapter offers the outcome of an in depth desk study on the topic of the EU transnational cooperation, explaining the evolution of it, terms such as INTERREG B programmes, EU macro-regional strategies as well as their structures, organisation and objectives. Furthermore, related theories on the concept of 'added value' and cooperation will be explained and a conceptual framework will be built, which will be useful for the research analysis and reflected in the thesis (*Chapter 2*). The methodology and data collection sources will be presented, giving the reasons and criteria for their choice in the next chapter and will be used according to the research questions set (*Chapter 3*). In the fourth chapter the first answers on the research questions will be given through the presentation of the analysis of the collected empirical data. The last chapter will be used for summarising and drawing some last conclusions on the findings, critically reflecting the research findings and suggesting some recommendations and areas of further research (*Chapter 5*).

## 1. The Transnational Cooperation in Europe

The transnational cooperation has a long history in the European continent. Although it has mainly been operationalised through the EU policies of the European Regional or Cohesion Policy, it has actually also been established through intergovernmental structures and practiced by the nation states themselves throughout the last twenty years. Being divided in two during the Cold War, strong historical differences have been developed among the member states, which made their contacts, if not impossible. However, especially the fall of the Iron Curtain constituted the cooperation between countries a necessity for the good relations of the nation states and certainly for the integration. In this chapter we will try to present the state of play of the transnational cooperation as it developed in the European Union, explaining the evolution and main concepts of three forms of transnational cooperation in the EU: the inter-governmental cooperation agreements, the INTERREG programmes and the EU macro-regional strategies. After this, the development of these forms in the two regions in hand will also be presented.

### 1.1 The European Cohesion Policy

Map 1.1 Regional Disparities in EU27 GDP/ Head (PPS), 2005



Source: [http://ec.europa.eu/regional\\_policy/what/index\\_en.cfm](http://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/what/index_en.cfm) (Last access 25/03/2013)

As also shown in the map above, the European Union consisting today of 27 member states still has to deal with their disparities and differences. We can observe that the GDP per head is not equal for all members and this shows the need for further development. This is the challenge that the EU has been facing through its existence and on what is continuing working on for more than twenty years: to achieve economic and social cohesion as well as equal development to its member states. Despite the fact that for a long time the development and spatial planning related issues have been a national policy, the need for a Cohesion Policy in Europe has been expressed and developed gradually in the EU (for the EU Regional and Cohesion Policy evolution, see Gioti-Papadaki, 2004). Although the improvement of life quality has already been mentioned from the Treaty of Rome (1958, Art. 30), it has not been until the '70s when the European Community took more action on this issue. The unemployment rates, the need for solving any regional problems at common ground, and the need for coordination of the regional policies resulted in the reform of the European Social Fund in 1971 (it was already created by the Treaty of Rome) and the creation of the European Regional Development Fund (1975), used to provide funding assistance on projects dealing with social and economic development according to the overall goals of the Community. Moreover, the accession of the so called cohesion countries, due to their large disparities in comparison to the other members, such as Ireland (1973), Greece (1981) and Spain and Portugal (1986) has made this need even stronger. In the Single European Act (1985) the terms of *economic and social cohesion* have been introduced and defined as the process of "reducing disparities between the various regions and the backwardness of the least-favoured regions" (EC Regional Policy, Inforegio). The big boost, nevertheless, for the Regional and Cohesion Policy has been given in the late '80s, and more specifically in 1989, during the European Commission Presidency of Jacques Delors, an emblematic EC figure in the late '80s- early '90s, whose pursuit for the Common Market, but also the economic development and cohesion in the member states has been decisive. In 1989 the doubling of the funding for Regional Policy projects, which have as a prerequisite the cooperation of the member states, is now a fact and the first initiatives for a more comprehensive European cooperation are set. One of the most important initiatives have been the INTERREG programmes, which until today continue playing an important role for the European cooperation. Certainly, the interest of the EU in the development has not ceased and it remained as a goal in the further Treaties. Such examples are the Treaty of Amsterdam (1997) mainly addressing the unemployment problem, with the most recent example of the Lisbon Treaty (2007) which declares that "territory matters", introduces the term of territorial cohesion and deduces it as one of the three main EU objectives for the future. Now territorial cohesion is a key element for economic growth, defining it as a "shared competence between the Union and its member- states" (Faludi, 2006, pg.667), shifting the attention away "from providing integrated spatial development frameworks for the EU" (Dühr et al, 2010, pg.209).

## 1.2 Forms of transnational cooperation in Europe

### 1.2.1 The INTERREG Programmes

The European Territorial Cooperation has been mainly realised through the INTERREG programmes, which focused on different types of cooperation of European regions. An important notice before the description of the INTERREG programmes is the way the regions are defined into administrative units to facilitate the cooperation. According to the official website of the EU Regional Policy, regarding that every country defines its administrative regions differently, the EU "for the purposes of managing programmes and comparing statistics devised the NUTS<sup>2</sup> system - dividing each country into statistical units (NUTS regions)" (Eurostat). To the NUTS 1 belong regions which are the "major socio-economic regions" (currently 97), to the NUTS 2 belong the "basic regions for the application of regional policies" (currently 270) and to NUTS 3 the "small regions for specific diagnosis" (currently 1294) (ibid).

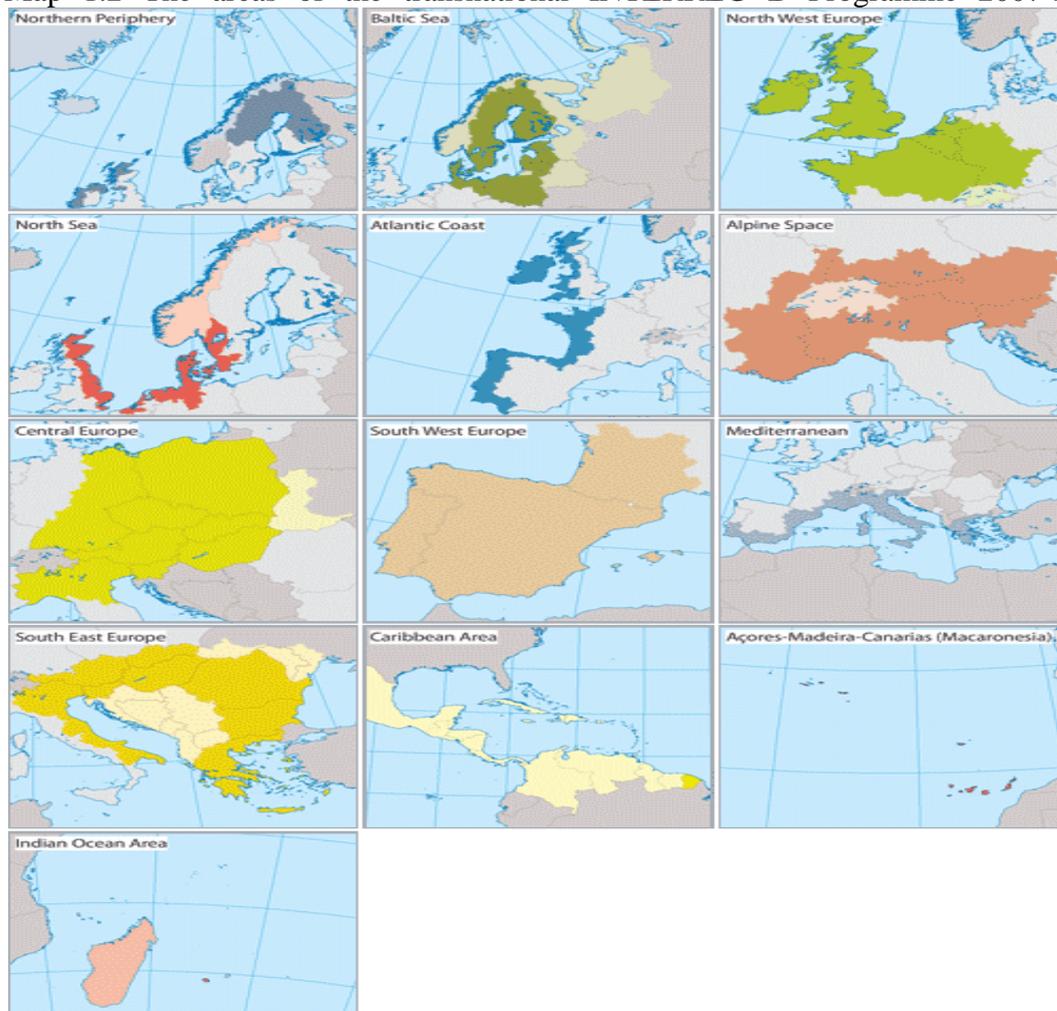
Early 1990s are set as the beginning of transnational cooperation, with the European Commission funded studies, Europe 2000 and Europe 2000+, prompting cross-border and transnational cooperation (Dühr, S. et al, 2010, pg.236). A real start for promoting transnational cooperation has begun with the INTERREG programmes. INTERREG is a European Commission's Initiative dated back to the beginning of the 90's and designed to foster cooperation among the member states, so as to "strengthen economic and social cohesion" (Dühr, et al 2010, pg.250) throughout the EU. Being an EC *Initiative* (emphasis added), they began more in the meaning and form of an "experiment" (Gløersen., et al, 2007, pg. 431 and Dühr S., Nadin V., 2007, pg.390), and as their aims were broadening, the programmes "developed [more] in a process of 'learning by doing' " (Dühr et al, 2010, pg.234 and Dühr S., Nadin V., 2007, pg. 375), taking into account that several changes in the EU have been occurred in terms of the realisation of the Common Market, the successive enlargement and the each presidency responsible. It is important to mention that the INTERREG programmes concern projects, which the member states or their regions would not be able to undertake otherwise (Dühr, et al., 2010, pg.234). Together with national sources, the main funding mechanism of the INTERREG programmes is the *European Regional Development Fund (ERDF)*, which subsidizes development projects up to 50%, 75% or 80% (ibid. pg.233) depending on the NUTS category a country belongs to, while the rest of the percentage is covered by member states' national or private sources. The until now four in total INTERREG programmes are divided both in four time periods, as well as in different cooperation strands. INTERREG I is the first INTERREG programme, and was set up in order to "support

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<sup>2</sup> Nomenclature des Unites Territoriales Statistique.

cross-border cooperation between neighbouring regions with a budget of ECU 1.1 billion (Dühr et al.,2010, pg.234). With a time span of 3 years, from 1990 -1993, the programme promotes cross- border cooperation, taking the first steps of multi-level governance, since the fund allocation is not targeted at national, but at local or regional authority level, as are the Euregions (ibid pg.234). In 1994 begins the INTERREG II programme, lasting until 1999. Combining the activities of the INTERREG I and the REGEN initiative, INTERREG II launches the first strands of cooperation: strand A stands for cross- border cooperation and strand B for the “completion of energy networks”, both initiated in 1994 (ibid). From 1997 a third strand is added, strand C, aiming at transnational cooperation on regional planning with a special focus on water management (EC Regional Policy, Inforegio). The INTERREG III follows the INTERREG II, having a budget of €4.875 billion and lasting from 2000-2006 (EC, Regional Policy, Inforegio). Important is to mention that in the INTERREG III, the three strands clearly define the level of cooperation: strand A stands for the cross-border cooperation, strand B for the transnational cooperation, while strand C for interregional cooperation.

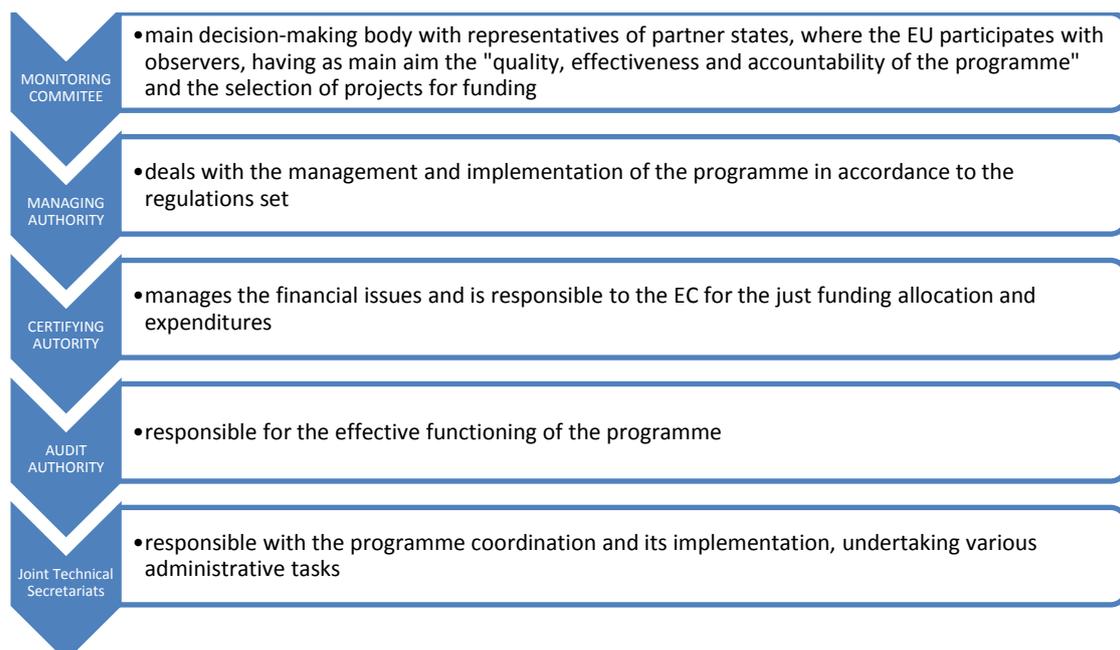
Map 1.2 The areas of the transnational INTERREG B Programme 2007-2013



Source:[http://ec.europa.eu/regional\\_policy/atlas2007/transnational/index\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/atlas2007/transnational/index_en.htm)  
 (Last access 25/03/2013)

With the INTERREG III, there has been special attention given to the territorial integration with candidate and other neighbouring countries, while the struggle for more social and economic cohesion is visible (Dühr et al, 2010). In addition, the evaluation systems for the projects and more specifically the ex-ante and mid-term (organised by the INTERREG programmes) as well as the ex post (organised by the EC) have become a requirement (ibid), underlining a shift to more result bringing and visible programmes and more efficient cooperation. The Lisbon Treaty has brought core changes not only in the European Union as such, but also in the field of the INTERREG programmes. For the next time era, 2007-2013, the following INTERREG IV has been incorporated in the European Territorial Cohesion objective, next to 'convergence' and 'competitiveness' objectives, retaining the three cooperation strands and having a total budget of €350 billion. The following territorial cooperation instruments will depend on the new *Europe 2020* objectives, of creating a smart, sustainable and inclusive Union. What we can notice from this brief overview of the INTERREG programmes, is that they are divided in funding periods and have specific objectives set for each one. These objectives are inspired and formulated according to the general objectives of the European Union. In the beginning of their creation, the Programmes opted more for economic growth, while now they focus on innovation and employment. Therefore they are considered as means of promoting European policies and accord to the EU policy trends of each time period. It is important to mention that the regional and local authorities play an important role in this form of cooperation and this can also be depicted in the following table, which shows the way the INTERREG B Programmes are structured today (*Table 1.1*).

Table 1.1 The INTERREG B Programme Management Structure



Graphic representation: author's own. Source: [http://www.southeast-europe.net/en/about\\_see/programmemanagementbodies/](http://www.southeast-europe.net/en/about_see/programmemanagementbodies/) (Last access 25/03/2013)

### **1.2.2 The transnational cooperation inter-governmental and sub-national agreements**

Although the transnational cooperation form of intergovernmental agreements is not included in the core topic of this master thesis, it might be useful to stress it, since it not only influenced or inspired the way that the member states cooperate, but also offered cooperation platforms which were useful for their further cooperation. By the term intergovernmental, it is meant that the governments of the EU member states work on a cooperative basis on issues of their common interest, without losing or giving up their sovereignty (Dühr et al 2010). The Madrid Convention (1980) has constituted an incentive for the development of such initiatives, creating a legal basis for them and promoting the cooperation among regions (ibid). Despite the fact that the European Union support on "funding and institutional mechanisms" has been of a great importance for a stronger involvement in the European transnational cooperation, the member states and regions have been "the first to promote cooperation on spatial development with the objective of tackling obvious and urgent shared problems through informal intergovernmental committees" (in Dühr et al 2010, pg. 232), especially after the fall of the Iron Curtain. Moreover, issues covered under such initiatives have inspire future policies of the EU as well (Dühr et al 2010). So in this case, we talk about the involvement and participation of the high political level mainly in the decision making. Therefore the agenda for the cooperation issues is organised on that level and based mainly on the focus interests of it. Some general examples throughout the history have been according to Dühr et al (2010) the Benelux Agreement (1986), the Anholt Agreement (1991) between the Netherlands and Germany, the Vienna Agreement (1993) between Austria and Italy etc. Nevertheless, such agreements are also to be noticed in the Baltic Sea and the Danube region, where they settled and cultivated a cooperation tradition. In the coming paragraphs, some of them will be presented.

### **1.2.3 The European Union macro-regional strategies**

Beginning in 2009 with the Baltic Sea macro-regional strategy and followed one year later by the creation of the Danube macro-region, the EU macro-regional strategies reflect the support of the European Commission (see EC, 2009, Communication concerning the EUSBSR pg.10 and EC,2010, Communication concerning the Danube macro-region pg.11-12). The macro-regional strategies have shown great enthusiasm among the scholars, regarding that they constitute the most recent territorial cohesion trend in Europe. This argument has gained even stronger attention under the new Territorial Cohesion Objective: The European Commission in its 5th Report on Economic, Social and Territorial Cohesion, clearly states that special emphasis should be given to "the role of cities, functional geographies, areas facing specific geographical or demographic problems and macro-regional strategies" (pg.xxviii). While on the other hand, the director general for regional policy, Dirk

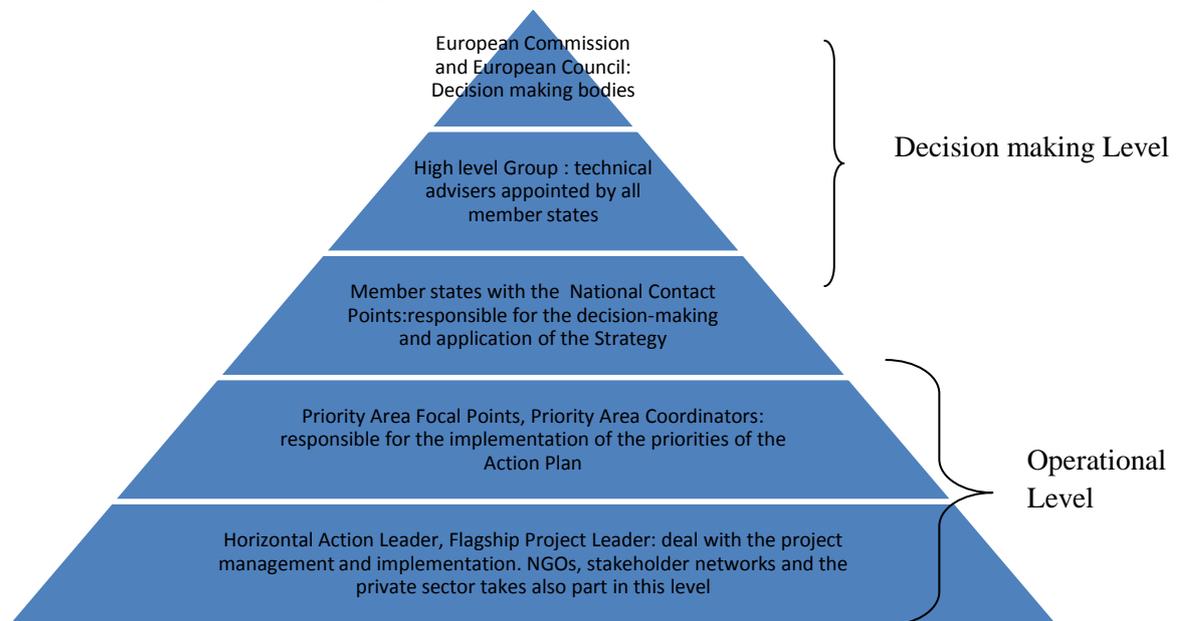
Ahner underlined that "macro-regional strategies are very important in stimulating cooperation...[and he expects]...to see a greater role for macro-regional strategies and transnational programmes" (European Territorial Cooperation. Building Bridges between people, EC, pg.139).

According to Dubois et al (2009), in order to define a macro-region, we first have to try and define the 'region', regardless of the prefix that it is accompanied with: "the term 'region' can refer to anything from an administrative unit to a functional area, they are formed and framed through specific practices, [while] they can be considered as products of indented actions by a set of stakeholders" (pg.17). They are "constructed, deconstructed and reconstructed through interaction between various actors in response to changes in their internal and external environment on the basis of what is most appropriate for the pursuit of their commonly held goals" (United Nations University in Dubois et al, 2009, pg.17). On the other hand, Dühr et al (2010) present the definition of a EU region, focusing on the NUTS division, under which the EU "seeks to provide a standardised set of 'regions', as a result of the Cohesion Policy"(pg.43), while there are discussions on the new "functional regions that have functional interdependences most often related to transport or water catchments, or economic relations"(ibid); this is of great importance for this paper, due to the fact that for tackling transport or environmental issues, the shift from the administrative borders to more flexible is necessary, especially in transnational spatial planning (ibid). Thus, as a macro-region would be defined "an area including territory from a number of different countries or regions associated with one or more common features or challenges" (Dühr, 2011, pg.6), where both EU member- and non-member states participate, aiming at "solving issues that cannot be dealt with by countries or regions on their own" (Dubois et al, 2009, pg.24). Ivanova (2012) defines the macro-region as an "established term in economic and political geography and spatial planning" (pg.1). While Braun and Kovács (nd), quoting the EC (2009a), define the macro-regions as "an area covering a number of administrative regions but with sufficient issues in common to justify a single strategic approach" (pg.79): There is a flow of bottom-up and top-down approaches, formed throughout the strategy and keeping the EC leadership respectively (ibid. pg.84). Dühr (2011), refers in her paper on the two types of macro-regions, as distinguished by the DG Regio: The first type includes issues, "opportunities and problems that cannot be satisfactorily addressed by regions or countries acting alone", as are environmental issues, while the second type addresses the creation of a macro-region, without a specific issue at hand, but through considering such a cooperation form of an advantage (pg.8). For Dubois et al (2009), a macro-regional strategy is " 'an integrated framework' that provides the necessary policy support to achieve this kind of cooperation"(pg.24). Clearly, it is the first type that the EC is interested. Therefore, when we talk about macro-regional strategies, we also refer to group of regions with no specific borders, but we talk about more loose, as the DG Regio emphasises, it "considers the boundaries of the macro-regions as being flexible and subject to the issue addressed" and as a result, "different actions may require different geographies, requiring a flexible approach to addressing them" (Dühr, 2011, pg. 6-7).

The EU macro-regional strategies are based on the innovative *three-NOs concept*: "no new legislation, no new funding and no new institutions" (Stocchiero, 2011, pg.3) and their priorities focus on environmental protection, region prosperity, safety, region connection (Baltic Sea Region strategy and Danube Region strategy website). They have become "a scenario in which several actors, state and non-state, public and private", "regions, entrepreneurs, citizens, political or societal stakeholders" "are equally interested in the process of regional integration and cooperation" (Dubois et al, 2009, pg.15;25). Once more, the personal contribution of the Commissioners of the EU Regional Policy, as J. Hahn or D. Hübner, as well as the importance of some countries, such as Sweden or Poland, which under the European Presidency mandate brought this idea into praxis, has definitely been an advantage. *Table 2* shows the structure of the EU macro-regional strategies.

Nevertheless, all these discourse raises the question of whether all these cooperation forms are necessary for the countries of the EU and whether there is something new to be seen. This fact generated the interest of the author to be investigated further and see the added value of this emerging cooperation form and what could be the arguments considering any possible combination of them. Certainly, the focus of the thesis is on the European Transnational Territorial Cooperation (INTERREG B Programmes) of the current funding period and the EU macro-regional strategies.

Table 1.2 The EU Macro-Regional Strategies Governance Structure



Graphic representation: Author's own. Source: CPMR (2012) and literature review resources.

### **1.3 The two cases in hand and their cooperation forms**

In this section the way that the transnational cooperation forms explained so far have been applied in the Baltic Sea and the Danube region, will be presented. Considering the INTERREG B Programmes we will focus on post-2000 period and especially the last programming period, when the three cooperation strands are clearly defined and the period matches more with the creation of the intergovernmental structure cooperation forms and the EU macro-regional strategies in the two regions.

#### **1.3.1 The Baltic Sea region**

##### **1.3.1.1. The Baltic Sea INTERREG Programme**

In the Baltic Sea transnational programme, there are in total eleven countries taking part, both members and non-members of the EU. These are: Denmark, Germany, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Finland, as well as Sweden, Belarus, Norway and Russia. The EU support for EU member states of the programme is provided by the ERDF, and the ENPI for Belarus and Russia, while Norway provides its own funding (EU- Regional Policy, Inforegio official website)

The total funding reaches €293 million with €231 EU assistance. Taking into account the Lisbon and Gothenburg Agenda, the Baltic Sea region aims at turning into a knowledge-based, socio-economic region, becoming a better and strong cohered place, addressing issues of importance for the region. Four are the thematic priorities of the programme:

1. To foster innovation, focusing on SMEs and technology
2. To improve internal and external accessibility, focusing on transport, information and technology
3. To manage the Baltic Sea as a common resource, supporting operations for the environmental protection of the area, especially on the maritime area.
4. To promote attractive and competitive cities and regions

Map 1.3 The countries in the Baltic Sea INTERREG B Programme (2007-2013)



Source: [http://ec.europa.eu/regional\\_policy/country/prordn/details\\_new.cfm?gv\\_PAY=LV&gv\\_reg=ALL&gv\\_PGM=1293&gv\\_defL=7&LAN=7](http://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/country/prordn/details_new.cfm?gv_PAY=LV&gv_reg=ALL&gv_PGM=1293&gv_defL=7&LAN=7) (Last access 25/03/2013)

Moreover, some funding is also allocated for the technical assistance of the programme. The achievements of the programme will be measured, through an indicators' set which include the politicians involved in the project activities, the amount of private and public investments made with the available funding, the tools, methods and model solutions used, the number of the approved projects and the number of transnational structures achieved (ibid). The Baltic Sea Programme 2007-2013 objective is "to make the Baltic Sea region an attractive place to invest, work and live in" (Baltic Sea Programme). Regarding the priorities for the region mentioned before, there are until now 26 projects undertaken for the first priority, 16 for the second, 20 for the third and 21 for the fourth one. In addition, for the policies are also divided in clusters, where the stakeholders can exchange expertise and knowledge. These are: The energy cluster, which includes nine projects, the water cluster, comprised of nine projects, the innovation cluster of ten projects and the transport cluster, counting eight projects.

### **1.3.1.2 The inter-governmental cooperation in the Baltic Sea**

The countries in the Baltic Sea managed to build a relatively strong cooperation platform in their region, so as to address issues of common importance or visions for the future of their region. To this helped also the intergovernmental initiatives taken mainly during the '90s and the cooperation relationship which was wished with Russia. For the economy of space, we will mention just a few together with a short description of their role. The Nordic Council of Ministers (Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway and Sweden, participation of Greenland, Faeroe Islands and Åland) is one of the oldest cooperation structures in the region, organised in 1971 and aims at "joint Nordic solutions that have tangible positive effects-Nordic Synergies for the citizens of the individual countries" (Nordic Council of Ministers official website). HELCOM (1974- Denmark, Estonia, European Community, Finland, Germany, Latvia, Sweden, Lithuania, Poland and Russia) is another old and very important organisation, especially for the environmental policy and the marine environment protection. An important achievement of HELCOM has been the HELCOM Convention, where the pollution sources of the whole sea were subjected to a single Convention (HELCOM official website). The Council of the Baltic Sea States (1992) included all Baltic Sea states and Russia and focuses on topics such as the environment, the economic development, energy, education and culture, civil security and sets through a rotation presidency several priorities each time (CBSS official website). The Nordic Dimension-ND (1997- EU, Russia, Norway, Iceland) focuses on stability, sustainable development, well-being by supporting cooperation for environmental protection, nuclear safety etc (ND official website). VASAB (1992- Denmark, Estonia, Lithuania, Finland, Germany, Latvia, Norway, Sweden, Poland, Russia and Belarus) deals with visions for the Baltic Sea in issues as the spatial planning, the environment and the sustainable development. In 1997 the Northern European Initiative (Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Northern Germany, Sweden, Norway, Iceland, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Northwest Russia) was settled up for the stability of the region and the stronger relationship with the US (NEI official website). The Barents Euro Arctic Council (Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway, Sweden, Russia, European Commission) established in 1993 concentrates on the cooperation for issues concerning the stability of the Barents region (Barents Euro Arctic Council). Last but not least, the Baltic Sea States Heritage Cooperation (1998) having as members all the Baltic Sea states is focused on cultural and heritage topics.

### 1.3.1.3 The EU Baltic Sea Macro-Regional Strategy (EUSBSR)

Map 1.4 The geographical coverage of the EU Baltic Macro-Regional Strategy



Source: <http://www.nordregio.se/en/Metameny/About-Nordregio/Research--Development/Geographical-scope-we-cover/Baltic-Sea-Region/> (Last access 25/03/2013)

The Baltic Sea Macro-Regional Strategy is comprised by eight European Union member states, while there is close cooperation with Norway, Russia and Belarus. The countries involved in the strategy are: Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Germany, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland and Sweden (EC COM, 2009). In the EC Communication it is stressed that the Baltic Sea Region is characterised by economic, environmental and cultural heterogeneity, shares however "common resources and demonstrates considerable interdependence", which may actually create a spill-over effect, affecting consequently different parts of the region (pg.2). After the request of the Council of the European Union in its report in 2006 for the creation of a Baltic Sea Strategy, the European Commission prepared a communication accompanied by an action plan, which present the challenges and opportunities, policy pillars, consultation process, as well as flagship projects respectively. The European Council adopts the EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region through the Presidency Conclusions, on 30. October 2009. Realising that the region has a big potential and experience in cooperation, it was observed that a more integrated approach for the sustainable development of the region, a "better coordination and a more strategic use of Community programmes"<sup>3</sup> is needed, while a stronger action for facing the new

<sup>3</sup> As related policies and programmes that have to be taken under consideration have been identified the EU Cohesion Policy, the Common Fisheries Policy, the Marine Strategy Framework Directive, the Helsinki Commission (HELCOM), the Common Agricultural Policy, the Single Market policies and the Lisbon Agenda, together with the Small Business Act, the European Research Area and its 7<sup>th</sup>

challenges has to be taken(pg.4). As a result four priorities pillars that reflect the need for action have been identified, which however "relate to a wide range of policies and will have impacts on other pillars" (ibid pg.6):

1. **An environmentally sustainable region**, focusing mainly on the protection of the marine environment and fishing activities
2. **A prosperous region**, promoting innovation and easing trade barriers to achieve stronger cohesion
3. **An accessible and attractive region**, dealing with transport and energy markets
4. **A safe and secure region**, aiming at less maritime pollution and fighting cross-border crime

The role of the Commission is based on providing consultation, having three main components: "non-papers from governments and other official bodies in the region, stakeholder events and public consultation" via the official website(ibid pg.10). In addition, the Commission is responsible for coordinating, monitoring, reporting, facilitating of the implementation and providing the follow-up, all in strong cooperation with the stakeholders (ibid). The accompanied to the EC Communication Action Plan, provides priority areas for each of the four pillars mentioned before, reaching a total of 15 priorities. For each of the priorities, there are priority areas coordinators, who are responsible for them. For the ease of the reading, we provide here a table, including the pillars, their priority areas and countries that coordinate them. On the 22<sup>nd</sup> of June 2011, the European Commission publishes the first report on the progress of the Strategy. In the report it is mentioned that many steps have been done, considering the implementation of projects on the priorities set. Many new projects have been launched, more impetus has been given to the already existing ones, while networks have been established (through projects sharing similar topics for example) and the cohesion in the region has been strengthened (pg.2-4). Moreover, the political will and commitment must remain strong, while a set of indicators and targets is necessary (ibid pg.7-8). The funding alignment is highly underlined, and the further policy alignment is recommended(pg.9). In response to this report, the European Commission publishes a second Communication on the 23<sup>rd</sup> of March 2012, "proposing improvements to the strategic focus, alignment of policies and funding, clarification of responsibilities of different actors and better communication" (pg.2), reflecting the upcoming Europe 2020 goals. To begin with, the policy alignment aims at more coherent and of territorial character policies, while the funding alignment stresses the need for better use of the existing funding mechanisms. Now, a clear role for the actor responsibilities is proposed, letting actors from different levels "local and regional authorities, national ministries, Commission services, private sectors and NGOs" to participate more actively and coherently and

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Framework Programme, the Trans-European Networks, the European Economic Recovery Plan and Agreements between the EU and Russia, especially on fishery issues. All these policies and programmes, apart from a cooperation basis, offer necessary funding. (EC COM, 2009,pg.5)

providing better communication facilities, as are the contact points (EC Communication, 2012, pg.3-6). It is important to mention that the former four policy pillars are now simplified and reduced to three main objectives:

1. **Save the sea**, dealing with environmental protection issues
2. **Connect the region**, aiming at better transport and infrastructure
3. **Increase Prosperity**, supporting social and economic cohesion

We need to underline that for each of the objectives there are indicators and targets proposed, as requested by the first report in 2011, in order to measure the progress of the region in these fields.

Table 1.3 The Pillars and Priority areas of the EU Baltic Sea Macro-Regional Strategy

Pillar	Priority Areas	Coordinating Country
<b>I. To make the Baltic Sea an environmental sustainable place</b>	1. To reduce nutrient inputs to the sea to acceptable levels	<b>Poland/ Finland</b>
	2. To preserve natural zones and biodiversity, including fisheries	<b>Germany</b>
	3. To reduce the use and impact of hazardous substances	<b>Sweden</b>
	4. To become a model region for clean shipping	<b>Denmark</b>
	5. To mitigate and adapt to climate change	<b>Denmark</b>
<b>II. To make the Baltic Sea Region a prosperous place</b>	6. To remove hindrances to the internal market in the Baltic Sea Region including to improve cooperation in the customs and tax area	<b>Estonia</b>
	7. To exploit the full potential of the region in research and innovation	<b>Sweden/ Poland</b>
	8. Implementing the Small Business Act: to promote	<b>Denmark</b>

	entrepreneurship, strengthen SMEs and increase the efficient use of human resources	
	9. To reinforce sustainability of agriculture, forestry and fisheries	<b>Finland</b>
<b>III. To make the Baltic Sea Region an accessible and attractive place</b>	10. To improve the access to, and the efficiency and security of the energy markets	<b>Latvia/ Denmark</b>
	11. To improve internal and external market links	<b>Lithuania/ Sweden</b>
	12. To maintain and reinforce attractiveness of the Baltic Sea Region in particular through education, tourism and health	<b>1) Tourism: Mecklenburg-Vorpommern (Germany)</b>
		<b>2) Health: Northern Dimension Partnership in Public Health and Social Well-being</b>
		<b>3) Education and others: Germany</b>
<b>IV. To make the Baltic Sea Region a safe and secure place</b>	13. To become a leading region in maritime safety and security	<b>Finland and Denmark</b>
	14. To reinforce maritime accident response capacity protection from major emergencies	<b>Denmark</b>
	15. To decrease the volume of, and harm by, cross-border crime	<b>Finland</b>

Source: EC Communication Action Plan (2009)

### 1.3.2 The Danube region

#### 1.3.2.1 The Central Europe Programme

The story for the INTERREG B Programmes covering the region around the Danube is slightly different from the one in the Baltic Sea. The latter has kept its geographical coverage since its creation, while the Central Europe Programme, together with the South-East Europe Programme explained afterwards, are built after the split up of the former CADSES Programme of the 2000-2006 (Central European Adriatic Danubian South-East European Space) (see map 1.3) and came to replace it.

Map 1.5 The CADSES Co-operation Area



Source: <http://www.cadses.ar.krakow.pl/mapka.html> (Last access 25/03/2013)

In the Central Europe Programme there are eight member states which participate: Czech Republic, Germany, Italy, Hungary, Austria, Poland, Slovenia and Slovakia, while the western part of Ukraine also takes part with its own resources and ENPI resources as well (EC, Regional Policy, Inforegio). The total Programme budget sums up €298 million, of which ERDF resources are €246 million. For the technical assistance there is also some funding allocated. The total Programme budget sums up €298 million, of which ERDF resources are €246 million. The main goal of the programme is to "strengthen territorial cohesion, promote internal integration and enhance the competitiveness" of the region, through innovation, environmental protection and sustainable urban development (ibid).

Map 1.6 The countries of the Central Europe INTERREG Programme (2007-2013)



Source: [http://ec.europa.eu/regional\\_policy/country/prdrn/details\\_new.cfm?gv\\_PAY=SI&gv\\_reg=AL&gv\\_PGM=1294&gv\\_defL=7&LAN=7](http://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/country/prdrn/details_new.cfm?gv_PAY=SI&gv_reg=AL&gv_PGM=1294&gv_defL=7&LAN=7) (Last access 25/03/2013)

The Programme focuses on four thematic priorities (ibid):

1. Facilitating innovation across central Europe
2. Improving accessibility of and within Central Europe
3. Using our environmental responsibility, regarding that the region is prone to environmental risks, as floods
4. Enhancing competitiveness and attractiveness of cities and regions

### 1.3.2.2 The South-East Europe Programme

Map 1.7 Countries of the South-East Europe Programme 2007-2013



Source: [http://ec.europa.eu/regional\\_policy/atlas2007/transnational/south\\_east\\_europe\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/atlas2007/transnational/south_east_europe_en.htm) (Last access 25/03/2013)

The other INTERREG B Programme which emerged after the former CADSES Programme is the South East Europe Programme. The South East Europe Programme encompasses a large number of countries, which are not only EU members, but also candidate, potential candidate and third countries as well. The participating countries, where the whole country is eligible, are: Bulgaria, Greece, Italy (only the regions Lombardia, Bolzano/ Bozen, Trento, Veneto, Friuli-Venezia-Giulia, Emilia Romagna, Umbria, Marche, Abruzzo, Molise, Puglia Basilicata, Hungary, Austria, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia, Albania, Bosnia & Herzegovina, Croatia, FYROM, Moldova, Serbia, Ukraine (only the regions Cjermovestka Oblast, Ivano-Frankivska Oblast, Zakarpatska Oblast and Odessa Oblast) ( EC, Regional Policy Info regio). The total programme budget is €245 million, while €206 million is coming from ERDF assistance. The main purpose of the Programme is to create a balanced territory within this very heterogeneous region of mixed countries. The Danube region plays an important role for the region, regarding its freight possibilities, as well as environmental challenges. The priorities of this programme are the following (ibid):

1. Facilitation of innovation and entrepreneurship; through the development of technology and innovation networks the enhancement of integration and better economic relations is aimed.
2. Protection and improvement of the environment, aiming at issues which require cooperation beyond the national barriers, in order to protect the region from environmental disasters. Water management is an example of the promoted policies
3. Improvement of accessibility, aiming at connecting local and regional actors to the European Networks, through developing transportation networks
4. Development of transnational synergies for sustainable growth areas, aiming at a polycentric development

Again, a part of the funding is allocated for the technical assistance of the programme.

### **1.3.2.2 The intergovernmental cooperation along the Danube Region**

Similar intergovernmental cooperation structures to the Baltic Sea have been built along the Danube region. The difference in this case is the large number of the participant countries and their heterogeneity both on economic and political backgrounds, since in many case there are both EU and non- EU member states. Again, we will name just a few intergovernmental cooperation structure, which can serve as an example. Starting with ARGE (Arbeitsgemeinschaft Donauländer-Germany, Austria, Slovakia, Hungary, Croatia, Serbia, Bulgaria, Romania, Moldavia, Ukraine) built in 1983 aims at common actions towards the environmental protection of the Danube river, its water quality as well as to strengthen the cultural relations among the nation states (ARGE official website). Another important group is the Visegrad group (Czech Republic, Poland, Hungary, Slovakia) works since its creation in 1991 on stronger cooperation on social and cultural cohesion, science, education, in the field of information with the aim of a stronger integration (Visegrad Group official website). The Central European Initiative (1989-Albania, Austria, Belarus, Bosnia Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Croatia, Hungary, Italy, FUROM, Moldova, Montenegro, Poland, Romania, Serbia, Slovakia, Slovenia, Ukraine) is an intergovernmental initiative which aims at strengthening regional cooperation and preparing the countries for their accession to the EU (CEI official website). The South East European Cooperation Initiative (1996 Albania, Bosnia Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Croatia, Greece, Hungary, FYROM, Montenegro, Moldova, Romania, Serbia, Turkey) focuses on the cooperation on issues of crime and security, as well as information exchange on this issue (SECI official website). The ICPDR (1998) is another famous intergovernmental structure among all nation states that are along the Danube river and has as main goal the cooperation on the protection of the Danube river and the quality of its water (ICPDR official website). The recent Regional Cooperation Council(2008) with a large number of not only members of the Central and South East Europe, but also other European states, focuses on economic and social development, energy issues, justice and crime fight (RCC official website).

The Alpine Convention (Austria, France, Germany, Italy, Liechtenstein, Monaco, Slovenia and Switzerland) which dates back to 1995, covers environmental, economical, cultural and social issues for the sustainable development of the Alpine space countries (Alpine Convention official website). Last but not least, the Council of the Danube Cities and Regions (1998) which consists of the countries and regions along the Danube river, which cooperate on good governance policies, human rights, democracy, economic development, culture and EU integration (CoDCR official website).

### 1.3.2.3 The European Union Danube Macro- Regional Strategy (EUSDR)

Map 1.8 The geographical coverage of the EU Danube Macro-Regional Strategy



Source: <http://www.regions.eu.org/?cat=62> (Last access 25/03/2013)

The example of the Baltic Sea strategy led in the creation of a second EU macro-regional strategy: The one of the Danube region. The Danube region is a "functional area defined by its river basin [and] concerns geographically primarily but not exclusively" the following countries: Eight countries, member states of the EU and namely Germany (Baden Württemberg and Bavaria), Austria, Slovak Republic, Czech Republic, Hungary, Slovenia, Romania and Bulgaria, as well as non-EU member states, Croatia, Serbia, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Montenegro, Republic of Moldova and Ukraine (EC Communication, 2010). Recognising the potential of the region and addressing further challenges and opportunities, the European Commission under the invitation of the European Council (June 2009) to create a strategy for the

Danube Region, prepares a communication, presenting the challenges and opportunities of the strategy, as well as setting priority areas, also presented more thoroughly in the accompanied action plan.

Among the challenges of the Danube Region are the mobility, regarding that the Danube is a crossing path for many countries, the energy prices, which still remain high, the environment, where stronger attention has to be given for its protection, flooding or drought risks, as well as social issues, such as economic disparities and security problems (ibid pg.4-5). On the other hand, the Community underlines its opportunities: opening "transport and trade links" to the east" promoting the cultural diversities, exploit of renewable resources and an exceptional environmental heritage (ibid pg.5). As a result the Commission responses with setting four pillars of priorities:

1. **Connecting the Danube Region**, where "no part should remain peripheral", dealing with issues such as transport, energy, culture and tourism
2. **Protecting the environment in the Danube Region**, its flora and fauna, which goes beyond national borders, addressing issues as water, risks related to water and biodiversity/soil
3. **Building prosperity in the Danube Region**, promoting "education and skills, research and innovation and enterprises, employment market" and helping marginalised communities (pg.9)
4. **Strengthening the Danube Region**, through building institutional capacity and security

A well structured and responsible cooperation framework among the stakeholders of different levels should be established for implementing the policies, while the Commission will be responsible for the policy-level coordination, "assisted by a high-level group of the member states" (ibid pg.10-11). The funding of other policies should be aligned for the strategy projects and reporting and evaluation mechanisms will be set by the Commission in cooperation with the stakeholders (ibid pg.12). Lastly, the strategy should be aligned to other EU policies and legislation, such as are the Europe 2020, for a smart, sustainable and inclusive Europe, Trans-European Networks for Transport and for Energy, the Single Market and the Digital Agenda, the European Neighbourhood Policy and its regional partnerships, as the Eastern Partnership (pg.13). Regarding that the Danube Region Strategy is relatively new, there has not been a progress report published yet.

In the following table we provide the four pillars expressed in the European Commission Communication, together with the priority areas and the coordinating countries, as set in the Action Plan (2010) and as are also presented in Dühr (2011, pg.30). Certainn factors have been taken under consideration for the identification of actions, and namely, "they should address identified priorities and support them, have an impact on the macro-region, be realistic, coherent and mutually supportive" (Action Plan, 2010, pg.4-5).

Table 1.4 The Pillars and Priority Areas of the Danube Macro-Regional Strategy

Pillar	Priority Areas	Coordinating Country
<b>I. Connecting the Danube Region</b>	1. To improve mobility and multimodality	<b>Inland waterways transport: Austria, Romania</b> <b>Rail, road, air transport:: Slovenia, Serbia (Interest shows Ukraine)</b>
	2. To encourage more sustainable energy	<b>Hungary, Czech Republic</b>
	3. To promote culture and tourism, people to people contacts	<b>Bulgaria, Romania</b>
<b>II. Protecting the Environment in the Danube Region</b>	4. To restore and maintain the quality of waters	<b>Hungary, Slovakia</b>
	5. To manage environmental risks	<b>Hungary, Romania</b>
	6. To preserve biodiversity, landscapes and the quality of air and soils	<b>Germany (Bavaria), Croatia</b>
<b>III. Building prosperity in the Danube Region</b>	7. To develop knowledge society through research, education and information technologies	<b>Slovakia, Serbia</b>
	8. To support the competitiveness of enterprises, including cluster development	<b>Germany (Baden-Württemberg), Croatia</b>
	9. To invest in people and skills	<b>Austria, Moldova</b>

<b>IV. Strengthening the Danube Region</b>	10. To step up institutional capacity and cooperation	<b>Austria (Vienna), Slovenia</b>
	11. To work together to promote security and tackle organised and serious crime	<b>Germany, Bulgaria</b>

Source: EC Action Plan (2011) and Dühr (2011)

#### 1.4 Summing up

The aim of this chapter was to describe and explain the context of the transnational cooperation in Europe. Indeed, transnational cooperation has been an integral part in the history of the European Union, and had an active presence in the regions researched in this master thesis, the Baltic Sea and the Danube region. Either initialised by a European Union initiative or by the member states themselves, or by both, the transnational cooperation in these regions has been very important. This was and continues to be their main goal: to foster cooperation and tackle with common problems, being however structured in a different way. Considering their governance structure, the EU led initiatives, on the one hand, as the INTERREG B Programmes, were adapting to each EU objectives of the time and constituted a big financial support from the EU budget for the regions, promoting their cooperation for a better integration. What they managed to achieve, was the involvement of several stakeholders from different governmental levels, underlying the importance of the local and regional authorities and stressing their power. This can also be seen by the management structure of the Programmes, which was mainly undertaken by local authorities. On the other hand, the intergovernmental cooperation structures were driven by the high political level, independent from the EU policies, since we usually talk about ministerial meetings or Councils of governmental authorities. These structures are based on the nation- state cooperation with neighbour countries, in order to cooperate on issues of common interests or challenges which should be faced together, such as environmental issues or crime fight. The EU macro-regional strategies, though, could be said, that are something in between: They developed bottom-up, after the Council's decision, however, the EU presence and participation is visible. They promote the EU overall objectives (as also do the INTERREG B Programmes) with no additional funding mechanisms, but with a better alignment of the existing one, while they also deal with common regional challenges (the focus of the intergovernmental transnational cooperation form). Moreover, judging from their management structure, we can observe that a lot is being decided on the governmental level, regarding that the political level of the countries is highly involved in the decision making. This is one of their most important feature- the political support. Do therefore the EU macro-regional strategies have something new to offer in the transnational cooperation? In the following chapters a conceptual framework for the research and a suitable methodology will be built, before the analysis of the empirical chapter on the main research questions.

## 2. Theoretical and Conceptual Framework

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**A**s it already has been presented, the European transnational cooperation dates back several years. Either nation state driven or EU-led, it managed to bring new insights in the way that countries used to develop their relations. Although in this master thesis we focus mainly on the INTERREG transnational cooperation programmes and the EU macro-regional strategies, the role of the sub-national cooperation forms should not be underestimated. In this chapter the reasons why countries tend to cooperate will be discussed for each transnational cooperation form. Moreover, concepts around the term of 'added value' will be presented, together with some approaches relevant to the issue, such as multi-level governance and flexible regions. Through all this presented information, the chapter will conclude in stressing the similarities and differences of the transnational cooperation forms, giving subsequently an answer to the second research question, while in the end the analytical framework will be set.

### 2.1 Why do nation states want to cooperate?

The reasons why countries may wish to be part of a transnational cooperation forms may vary. As described in the beginning of this research, history indeed matters and plays a crucial role. The Cold War, apart from other consequences, managed to influence people minds and influence countries' relations. However, the fall of the Iron Curtain set the scene for a new start and cultivated the idea of stronger cooperation. While in Western Europe the European Community was being established, in the East, countries tried to put an order in the chaos left. As Fitzmaurice (1993) mentions in his article, the fall of the Soviet Union raised new hopes, and there was a wish of "return to Europe" to be seen, since countries were keen on becoming a member of the EC (pg.380), something that was too ambitious to be achieved at that time. Therefore, the sub-regional cooperation would be very important, in terms of dealing with common issues and establishing "contacts with each other" (ibid pg381). Overcoming the historical bargains, since the cooperation ties were loose in Eastern Europe, nation states create the first regional cooperation forms (Vise Group, Nordic Council, Council of the Baltic States, Central European Initiative etc), having, though, as main priority the EC accession and regarding the regional cooperation as an "ersatz alternative" (ibid). During the core changes in the European Community, which became after the Maastricht Treaty (1992) a European Union with a Common Market, it was more than necessary for the countries of the East to be part, since time was passing by. It was only in 2004 when the majority of the Eastern countries achieved their goal and entered the EU. From this it can be recognised that the main reason for these countries to build regional cooperation forms was their willingness to be part of the EC and to show that they are able to act

collectively on regional challenges. It is a fact that all EU member states of Central and East European Union "have been involved in one or more of the numerous multi-lateral sub-regional cooperation initiatives which have emerged in post-Cold War Europe (Dangerfield, 2001). Their creation managed in the end, to make contributions not only in "security and integration in the new Europe, but also to the EU pre-accession process" (ibid pg. 56). Dangerfield (2001) underlines that "for the more outlying SEE countries, particularly the laggards in the group of current EU candidates and those do far without EU associate membership, the likelihood of a very long wait for EU membership and the prospect of disruptions in relations with the fast track accession candidates, means that the question of sub-regional cooperation as an alternative to EU membership is at least due some serious reflection (ibid). Trying to work together on issues such as security, or to adopt a "common pre-accession strategy", made the regional cooperation in CEE countries important (ibid pg.58). According to Bertrand(1996) cited in Dangerfield (2001), the sub-regional groupings formulated were important for the following reasons: They are a "practical means of integration, creating interdependence and solidarity", they fostered cooperation, economic development was fostered as well, coordinating NGOs and private sector, they strengthened economic ties between EU members and non-member states, it offered practical experience and "helped to create an economic and political continuum in Europe" (pg. 58-59). As a result, the effort for a EU accession has been the driving force of the Central and Eastern European countries to develop regional cooperation. Nevertheless, apart from a "practice" phase before their final accession, they also managed to develop gradually political networks and initiate a cooperation structure, unique for the region, avoiding a further division (Cotter, 2000). In the Baltic Sea, though, things were not entirely differ: In countries such as Poland, Lithuania or Latvia the reasons were the same as explained. For the Scandinavian countries, however, there was a stronger tradition in cooperation, dating from the "Hanseatic cooperation and the Pomor cooperation" (ibid pg.25). In the Baltic, sub-regional ties are being built (e.g. Council of the Baltic Sea States), working on security, human rights, democratic institutions etc and some nation states enter earlier the EU.

The European Union has supported the regional cooperation forms emerging in its territory, taking a "leading role" in it and having "institutional ties with some of the sub-regional groups" (ibid pg.39). At the same time, in the European Union starts developing its INTERREG Programmes, based also on transnational cooperation. In this case it was not the EU accession, but the Cohesion Policy of the EU which was introduced after the set of the Single European Act (1986) . The cooperation of the member states was a prerequisite for the funding allocation and according to their geographic position and GDP, regions in the EU belonged in transnational Programmes. In this European Union context it is not the nation states as such, but more the regions which play a more active role, since the EU had to apply the already existing way of cooperating under its umbrella too. It tried to de-centralise the nation states and focus more on lower governmental levels. There are two terms that have

been of great importance for this: the *subsidiarity* and the *proportionality* principle. In the beginning of the '90s, a new principle was launched by the European Commission in order to facilitate its work: the principle of subsidiarity. By the subsidiarity principle it is meant that "decisions within a political system should be taken at the lowest possible level consistent with effective action" (Jordan A., Jeppesen T., 2000, pg. 66). This means that decisions shall be taken "as closely as possible to the citizen" and the EU should only intervene in case its contribution might be more effective than this of the member states (ibid pg.66). Thus, subsidiarity underlines the principle of the "sovereignty of the people", where power granted from a bottom up approach, so in this case we are talking about a different level authority allocation (Shaw D., et al 2000, pg.86). The principle of subsidiarity was initially introduced in the Single European Act (Article 174[4]) and became a "general principle of joint action in the Treaty of Maastricht" and the known article 3b (Knill C., Liefferink D., 2007), which, as quoted in Jordan A., Jeppesen T., 2000, (pg.66), it states that "in areas which *do not fall within its exclusive competence*, the Community shall take action... *only if and in so far as* the objectives of the proposed action cannot be sufficiently achieved by the member states and can therefore...be better achieved by the Community" (emphasis added). In the Protocol of the 1999 Amsterdam Treaty, the legal meaning of the principle was enriched. As a result, 'hard politics', such as the economy, taxation or the integration policy remained under the EU competence, while softer policies, such as the environmental policy, were suggested more local intervention. One of the great challenges of this innovative principle is its implementation, which was not always an easy task and it was not applied in each member state equally. As for the proportionality principle, it "regulates the exercise of powers by the European Union [seeking] to set actions taken by the institutions of the Union within specified bounds" (EU website,). Therefore the "involvement of the institutions must be limited to what is necessary to achieve the objectives of the Treaties" (ibid). From the above, we can see that the nation states in the EU, formed cooperation structures to achieve the objectives of the EU Cohesion Policy and this was operationalised through the above explained principles. They had to cooperate, take decisions and develop networks at low levels (subsidiarity) and as much as in compliance to the EU Treaties, without much intervention from the EU side (proportionality). Member states' interests are promoted as well, but through the EU procedures and regulation, and not national agreements, while common European interests are promoted too. On the other hand, the case of the EU macro-regional strategies is kind of combining the two aforementioned cooperation forms. A solid ground for cooperation has been built and the Strategies are mainly bottom-up approaches which apply to the EU policies and aim at the achievement of the EU goals. Specific regions in the EU have specific challenges to address that should be tackled commonly. However, the creation during the years of several funding mechanisms to support cooperation raised the need for a coordination of them. The main reason for the cooperation of the actors under a macro-regional approach has been the need to coordinate different sectors and mainly to coordinate several funding mechanism under one. As Dühr (2011) stresses, the EU macro-regional strategies are "promoted as models to achieve territorial cohesion, the

integration of sector policies and the coordination of actors at different levels of governance"(pg.3). All these, regarding that the EUMSR do not demand any additional funding or institutional building or legislation (three NOs). For the Baltic Sea it was mainly the sea pollution of the Baltic that constituted a more "integrated framework" for its improvement necessary (EUBSR official website) Commissioner Hübner had stressed for the Danube macro-regional strategy that "a one-size-fits all approach does not work in an EU of 27 member states and 271 regions. We need a targeted policy for the Danube that meets its ecological, transport and socio-economic needs" (EUDRS official website).

### **2.2 Approaches setting the scene for the forms of transnational cooperation forms**

#### **2.2.1 The multi level governance approach**

Before starting with the theories around the added value, it would be useful to set the scene for all the three transnational cooperation forms, concerning the approaches around the multi-level governance and the functional regions discussions. Although nation states maintain the major role of governance and sovereignty, it is true that during the past years the traditional mechanisms of governance have been changed and new arrangements of governance have arisen (van Kersbergen and van Waarden, 2001 pg.5-6). We nowadays talk more and more about a *shift in governance*, ie "the emergence of multi-level, multi-actor and multi-sector governance" (Arts and Lagendijk, 2009), where the state gradually leaves its "overall manager" role (ibid.pg.236) it played so far, giving the floor by ceding part of their sovereignty to global governance, regionalism and market and civil society interventions to take part in policy making. To this end have both globalization and regional organizations establishment contributed, such as the European Union, creating new forms of governance. On the other hand, the rising emergence of NGOs, which provide knowledge and can mobilize the public interest, gain thus ground on the new type of government arena, let alone lobbying, which is also a key actor. One of the main concepts used to explain the implementation of the transnational cooperation, is the multi-level governance, which gives the floor to regional and local authorities to take part in the decision making of their cooperation. The multi-level governance, was initially described by Hoogh and Marks as a "system of continuous negotiation among nested governments at several territorial tiers-supranational, national, regional and local" (Marks, 1993, pg.392 in Hoogh and Marks, 2003, pg.234), applying this theory to the European Union policies in general. According to the authors, "multi-level governance allows decision makers to adjust the scale of governance reflect heterogeneity". They distinguish two types of multi-level governance- Type I and Type II, based on the jurisdictions that may be undertaken. More specifically, the Type I of multi-level governance "describes jurisdictions at a limited number of levels, [which]- international, national, regional, meso, local- are

general purpose, [bundling] together multiple functions, including a range of policy responsibilities and in many cases, a court system and representative institutions"(ibid pg.236). On the other hand the second type of multi-level governance (Type II), "is composed of specialised jurisdictions, is fragmented into functionally specific pieces" which means that they are providing service at specific issues" (ibid). The following table briefly summarises the two types of multi-level governance, as Hoogh and Marks (2003) illustrated them in their article (pg.236).

Table 2.1 Type I and Type II of multi-level governance (Hoogh& Marks,2003)

Type I	Type II
<b>General purpose jurisdictions</b>	Task-specific jurisdictions
<b>Non-intersecting memberships</b>	Intersecting memberships
<b>Jurisdictions at a limited number of levels</b>	No limit to the number of jurisdictional levels
<b>System wide architecture</b>	Flexible design

Source: Hoogh& Marks (2003, pg.236)

The multi-level governance, to which as said is mainly referred as a concept or as Stubbs (2005) mentions, a "framework rather than a model or a theory" (pg.73), since it actually describes in a limited scale the situation and formation of relationships among actors, rather that explains how this can be used in a larger geographical scale. Despite the fact that the macro-regional strategies include the interaction of many actors from different levels, they are also characterised by flexible or fuzzy boundaries and they are not built or divided according to the countries' GDP.

### 2.2.2 The functional regions

The cooperation forms examined in this master thesis, besides their general structure differences, are also different in their geographical context. Apart from the intergovernmental cooperation, where the geographic space is clearly defined, ie it is the nation states as such, the INTERREG B Programmes and the EU macro-regional strategies have a difference. The first ones are built upon fix boundaries of regions, based on the GDP criteria, necessary for the funding allocation. However, the EU macro-regional strategies are characterised by 'flexible' boundaries and regions and we talk more about 'soft spaces' and 'fuzzy boundaries'. 'Soft spaces' and 'fuzzy boundaries' (see Allmendinger and Haughton,2009), are spaces where the borders of cooperation are more flexible and based on the interest priorities, instead of the administrative boundaries that have so far been the principle for the cooperation. According to Allmendinger and Haughton (2009) cited in Dühr (2011), "they require actors to acknowledge that they must work within multiple spaces, and increasingly in a flexible and task specific manner" (pg.38). We talk about flexible functional/

flexible geographies, meaning that "geographies change depending on the question being addressed" (ibid pg.38). Blatter (2004) makes an interesting contribution to the notion of functional spaces. His article focuses on a shift from the "spaces of place" and the "spaces of flows", where the differences between the territorial governance and the functional governance. As functional regions are identified "as areas of interdependent territories that do not necessarily coincide with political-administrative territorial units and that span national borders (Mirwaldt K., et al 2010, pg.3) and these regions serve the functional governance, while the territorial governance corresponds to the opposite characteristics. Therefore, what Blatter (2004) stresses is that due to the shift from government to governance, that we also explained in the beginning of this chapter, there is gradually another change happening, from a territorial governance to a functional one. To quote him, the difference between the two types is the following: *"In the ideal type of territorial governance, the lines of interaction are predominantly vertical, the information flows primarily within the national units and only 'at the top' across national boundary. In the ideal type of functional governance, though, both boundaries, the territorial and the sectoral, are blurred. In this type we expect direct contacts between subnational actors of various types as well as the inclusion of non-public sector organisations and trans-boundary institutions."* (pg.533). The characteristics of the functional governance mentioned are to be seen in the structure of the macro-regional strategies. Here various actors take part, from the political level, to several organisations and we can observe what Blatter (2003) calls "Europe with the regions" (instead of "Europe of the regions, which excluded the nations), i.e. where "governance no longer excludes governmental actors but points to a strengthened collaboration among various levels of the politico-administrative system based on exchange and negotiation among equals" (pg.531). This can be one of the differences that we can see between the structure of the transnational cooperation programmes and the one of the EU macro-regional strategies. According to CPMR (2012): *"the boundaries of the macro-regions are defined more in terms of problems and opportunities, and by type of geographical features contained within it (river, lake, mountain, sea etc) than by their area in strictly geographical terms or by number of members; macro-regions are flexible, corresponding to "functional" geographical limits based on shared problems"* (pg.3). While being a functional area, the macro-regions have "no pre-established borders and [their] definition is closely linked to the quality and number of joint problems that will be considered" (ibid). In his article, Blatter makes a very interesting and useful division of these two governmental forms, in order to clearer see their differences. They are summarised in the following table (Blatter, 2003, pg.534). In addition to the above, Stead (2011) also contributes to this, arguing that in the macro regional strategies "various scales of 'soft spaces' can be identified, ranging from local and regional through to transnational" (pg.163), while Samecki also underlined that "today's complex challenges do not respect rigid boundaries" and therefore new cooperation types might be necessary (EC, 2009b, pg.1).

Table 2.2 Territorial Governance (spaces of space) and functional governance (spaces of flows)

	<b>Territorial governance (spaces of space)</b>	<b>Functional governance (spaces of flows)</b>
<b>Structural pattern of interaction</b>	Hierarchy: monocentricity	Network: polycentricity
<b>Sectoral differentiation</b>	Separation of public and private/ non-profit actors	Integration of public and private/ non-profit actors
<b>Functional scope</b>	Broad (all/many tasks)	Narrow (one/ few tasks)
<b>Geographic scale</b>	Bundled/clear-cut scales: congruent boundaries	Multiple/ fuzzy scales: variable geometry
<b>Institutional stability</b>	Stable/rigid with respect to time and space	Fluid/flexible with respect to time and space

Source: Blatter (2003, pg.534)

### 2.3 What are the similarities and differences of the transnational cooperation forms? A summary

Until now, we have both described the way that the European Transnational Territorial Cooperation Programmes (INTERREG B) and the sub-regional cooperation, as well as the EU macro-regional strategies in the Baltic Sea and the Danube region have evolved. In this chapter, we discussed the reasons why nation states have cooperated under the aforementioned cooperation forms, while furthermore presented some approaches which are useful for understanding the concept of the EU macro-regional strategies in comparison to the INTERREG B. Reflecting the above, some similarities and differences can be identified, which will be summed up in this section. For the ease of the reader, they are divided in three categories: initiation, governance and geography.

The reason that each cooperation form was initiated shows as well the way that it operates. The sub-regional or intergovernmental transnational cooperation form in Europe, as has already been mentioned started by the member states, after the end of the Cold War. Then it was realised that having a form of transnational cooperation and sharing common goals with neighbouring countries was necessary for their admission in the EU. On the other hand, the INTERREG Programmes were an EU initiative under the Cohesion Policy, to financially assist member states so that their disparities may gradually be reduced. While the EUMRS came to coordinate funding mechanisms and institutions, so as to build a new and more strategic cooperation form. Both sub-regional structures as well as the MRS derive from national initiatives,

on the one hand are the national governments directly, on the other the according authorities through the Council of the European Union. In the case of the INTERREG Programmes, although the participation of actors from different levels is a fact, they were initiated after the Single European Act and through the Structural Funds for the EU Cohesion Policy. As has mentioned, they fostered cooperation and promoted the objectives set by the EU for each funding period. While for the sub-regional structures national common interests on a specific region upon which the structure was built, were promoted. It has to be noted that their difference with the other two cooperation forms is that they are not directly related to the EU policies- rather to national ones. The macro-regional strategies are based on common challenges as well: They aim at dealing with the problems of the two specific regions, on topics that were decided through the Action Plan. Here lies the first difference between the EUMRS and the INTERREG B Programmes: The EUMRS offer a more collective and strategic framework for cooperation, while the INTERREG B Programmes ended up in a financial instrument promoting the EU policies. The Strategies are characterised by the three NOs framework due to which they have to align with the existing funding and institutional mechanisms. From the above, it can be said that the EUMRS in a way combine the other existing cooperation forms: Emerging from a governmental initiative and applying to the EU policies and objectives.

Considering the governance approach of the three, all involve actors from several governmental level. Certainly, the sub-regional arrangements are mainly based on central authorities, however, the local / regional authorities or NGOs are not excluded in the cooperation. The other two forms, which are of main interest of this research, are characterised by a multi-level governance approach, explained in 2.1.1. By this it is meant that not only the highest authority level, but also actors from the regional and local authorities, NGOs, etc take part. Their main difference is in their decision making actors and this can be seen through their organisational structure. For the INTERREG B Programmes it is mainly the regional authorities who decide upon the Projects that will be undertaken with the supervision of the EU. The latter does not have an active role, it is rather more a controlling issue. If we take a look again at the Table 1.1, we can see that the structure of the INTERREG B Programmes has a regional authority character and higher levels are not included in it. Apart from the Joint Secretariat, which is the operational part, there is a managing authority, responsible for the decision making and an audit authority, for the economic issues. On the other hand, the EUMRS have a strong involvement of the national authorities, as can also be seen again in Table 1.2. The European Commission takes a more active role in the promotion of the Strategy and the assistance to it, while high level groups with technical advisers from all member states are set and assist the Strategy implementation as well, Moreover, there are additional the national contact points created for each participant member help in promoting the Strategy in the region. Here we can see that the high political level is present and active and it is what differentiates the EUMSR from the INTERREG B Programmes in terms of governance structure. Certainly, the EUMRS are also comprised by the operational

level, as are the Priority Area Coordinators, are responsible for the implementation of the Strategy (as are in the other case the Joint Secretariats). Another innovation in the EUMRS structure is the involvement of member states too from several member states in several positions, playing an active role and therefore the decision making or operational power is not concentrated in specific countries. Moreover, they are characterised by the 3NOs concept, which does not allow them to build any new institutional frameworks, but make better use of the existing ones.

Last comes the geographic coverage of the transnational cooperation form. What is to be observed here is the boundaries issue and the 'geographical overlapping' among the cooperation forms. Starting for example from the sub-regional arrangements, the boundaries are clear and fix and are the boundaries of the nation states. Countries may though participate in more than one sub-regional cooperation groups, as for example Poland, which is member both of the Baltic Sea Council and the VISE Group, being part both of a Baltic Sea region as well as a Central Europe sub-regional agreement. However, here we talk about nation states that overlap and not regions. In the case of the INTERREG B Programmes, as has previously been explained, the *regional* boundaries are fix as well: They are based on the GDP criteria and the regions are divided under the NUTS category, according to which the funding is allocated. In contrast to this, the EUMRS are built on more flexible boundaries (see also 2.2.2): the regions are not divided through certain categories and are more 'fuzzy'. Where they are based on, is a common geographic denominator, in our case the Baltic Sea and the Danube river, the problems across which they are aiming to solve. It is common that regions here overlap with the INTERREG B Programmes, since many of them take part in both, i.e. can be part of an INTERREG B Programme and of a macro-regional strategy, as well as at the same time, be members of an sub-regional agreement.

The transnational cooperation forms highlighted in this master thesis share both some similarities, as well as core differences. As a reason why the EU macro-regional strategies emerged may also be that they have something new and innovative to bring in the transnational cooperation- an added value. Taking a look at the added value in the European Transnational Cooperation, we will build the analytical framework, which is based on this chapter.

### **2.4 What has been the added value of transnational cooperation?**

The term of "added value" may have several meanings, according to the science it is applied. Colomb (2007) has made an important contribution on the added value of transnational cooperation, giving some first definitions as well. In the Structural Funds context, the concept of added value is defined as "value resulting from the Community assistance that is additional to that which would have been secured by national and regional authorities and the private sector" (Colomb, 2007,

pg.347). As an example, it is mentioned the cooperation across river basins in order to prevent problems such as flood risks (ibid). Mairate(2006) stresses that the "added value is being used [by the Community] to justify expenditure on Cohesion Policy (pg.168). In the European Parliament study on the added value of the Structural funding (2009), the term 'added value' is defined as "an increased value resulting from Community action, and economic and non-economic benefits associated with Cohesion Policy and related to the extent to which this adds value to member states' administration interventions" (pg. 68). Moreover, "added value is defined as a positive effect of Cohesion Policy management and implementation of member states' own policies for regional/ economic development", either through the EU Cohesion Policy influence or the member states' changes in the way of managing domestic policies (ibid pg. 70). This separates the issue of influence of the EU regional policy from national regional policies, contributing to the definition of the added value (ibid). Bachtler and Taylor (2003) cited in the same study, categorise the added value into five categories: Expressed as "solidarity aspect between the richer and poorer member states", as serious of "positive regional development aspects and specific effects" (e.g. enhanced regional political recognition, maintenance of local employment), as "improving the governance process of regional development"(e.g. strategic planning, learning through experience transfer), as "cooperation and knowledge and exchange related benefits" ("interregional cooperation, information society, good practice exchange) and adjusting national policies to the funding of the EU Structural Funds (pg. 68). Considering the EU programmes, the added value is categorised as follows: the political added value, i.e. "making the EU more visible to its stakeholders", a policy added value i.e. "promotion of a strategic dimension in regional development policy making", "collaborative working (partnership)", learning added value (encouraging learning) (pg. 70). According to Colomb (2007) the framework of transnational cooperation in the EU, it can be a result of two processes. On the one hand, "cooperation across borders can help is expected to tackle specific strategic spatial development issues at a new scale and in a bigger way than without cooperation and solve spatial planning problems which were previously addressed in an inefficient way" (pg.347). On the other hand, "cooperation across borders can help individual actors to improve their local/ regional spatial development policies by learning from the 'good' practices, innovative policies and technologies used by other partners in the transnational network [which is mainly] of local nature" (pg.348). In the local level, the added value may be seen in case of an increase in effectiveness and efficiency through the "emulation of policies and practices" (ibid). In the same article it is stressed that the "potential" added value may result from the organisational and policy learning i.e. the fact that actors have learned to cooperate under new frameworks and scales, building networks and learning from each other in order to solve common problems. Another important aim for added value would also be the Europeanisation, i.e. European identity building. This is the biggest aim in the EU and with this topic have been engaged several scholars (see Dühr, Nadin 2007 as an example). The added value of the EU Cohesion Policy may be summarised in the following points. On the economic sector it managed to help countries that were

lagging behind (as Greece, Spain, Portugal and Ireland), while it assisted on job creation (Mairate,2006). In addition, the Structural Funds have helped in achieving integration and here is where the INTERREG Programmes play an important role in the cooperation across borders: "INTERREG has contributed in greater Cohesion and integration by reducing the impact of national, economic and cultural barriers (ibid pg.171). The promotion of 'good practices' as well as the "transfer of good practices" among the actors is also seen as an added value (Bachtler & Wren, 2006; Mairate, 2006 pg.173), as well as the effective funding allocation (Mairate, 2006, pg.173). Moreover, the networking developed among the actors constitutes an important added value as well, while a "trust-based" relationship among the partners is an advantage (ibid). Impacts have also been on "local institutional structures [as a sign of the] ...closer European integration among citizens, business and even local authorities that have not been traditionally active in the EU policy making (ibid pg.174-175). Lastly, Mairate (2006) stresses that a strategic dimension of the Cohesion Policy will enhance its added value, since it will "strengthen the link between the financial instruments and the policy priorities through a more active contribution of the Structural Funds" (pg.175). On the national level, the EP study on added value, summarises the added value of the regional policy in "new policy area development, policy process added value, creation of new institutional structures and modernisation of existing ones, new policy practice ethos development, policy coordination improvements, improvements in relation to the 'enlargement experience' and emerging European citizenry" (pg.70-71). In an Inforegio factsheet of 2006, where ten questions about the future Cohesion Policy are set and answered, it is mentioned that based on evaluations "between 1988 and 2001 the gap between the poorest regions and the EU average has been reduced by one- sixth", where convergence countries such as Greece and Portugal have increased their GDP (pg.3). In the same document it is stressed that for the previous funding period 2007-2013, there is an additional GDP growth of around 7-12% (ibid). The main contribution of Structural funding has been the introduction of "well-defined targets and goals in planning and programming and in regional development policy", the quality of programming has also been improved, while the "capacity building of administrations at local, regional and central governmental levels increased and new cooperation networks at local level have been developed, raising the "ownership of local development amongst regional and local actors (public and private) (EP study on added value, pg.137,139) .

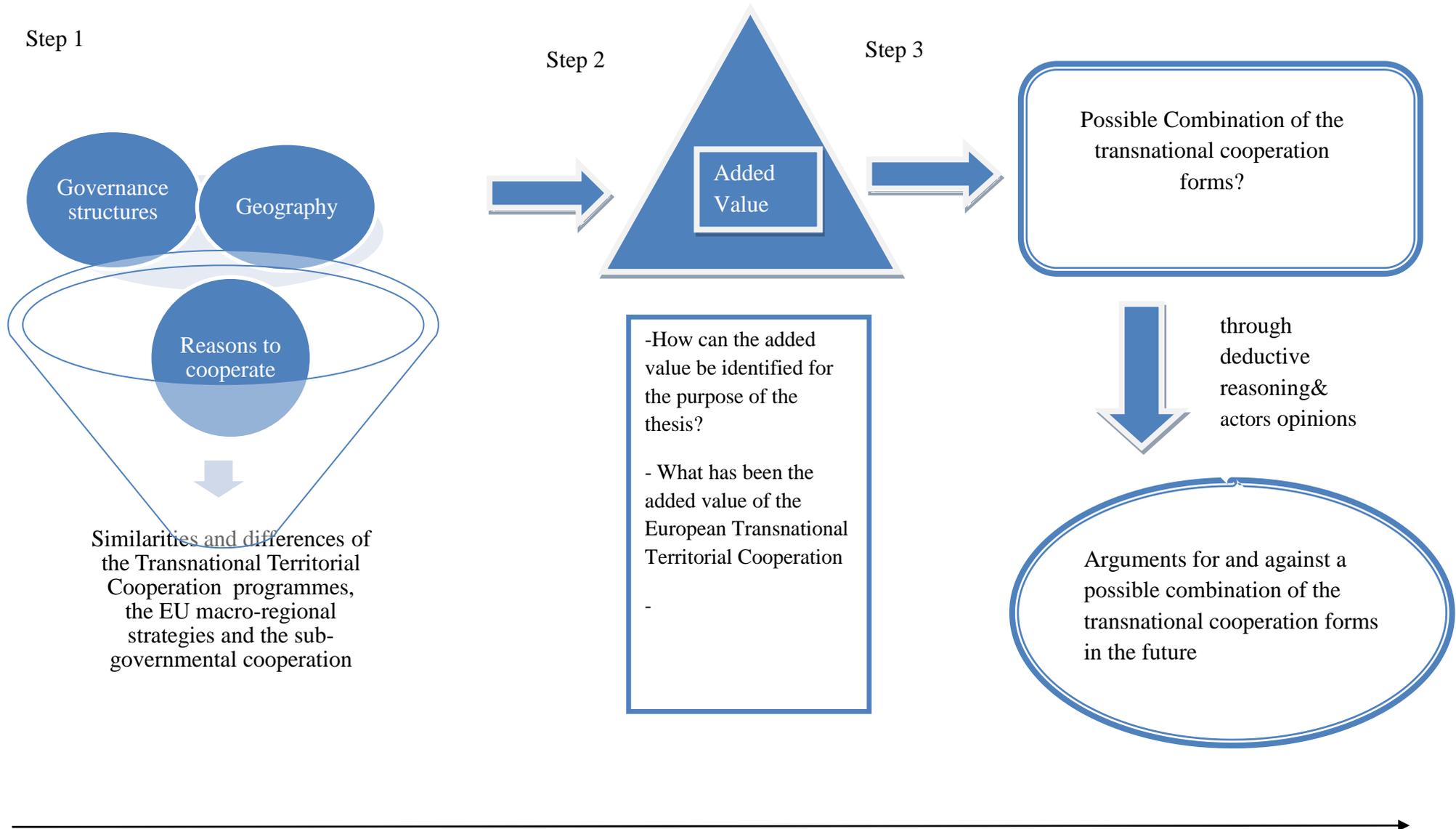
From the above it can be concluded that the main added value of the transnational cooperation, which is actually a part of the Cohesion Policy, has been the institutional building, the better cooperation, the increase of local powers, the better cooperation, the mutual learning, the adjustment of national policies to the EU policies and vice versa and of course the network building among the actors. To this Europeanisation processes may also be added, although this seems as a too optimistic target. Keeping all these in mind, the analytical framework for the research is built in the following scheme and concludes this chapter.

## 2.5 Conceptual Framework

The following scheme represents the analytical framework of the research of this master thesis. It is divided into three steps, depicting the steps taken in order to answer the four research sub-questions and in the end the final research question. In the geographical space of the Baltic Sea and the Danube region, and the time framework of Cohesion Policy, the scheme starts with the setting of similarities and differences of the transnational cooperation (chapter 2.3). Collecting the necessary information on the three transnational cooperation forms, their similarities and differences are summed up. This helps clarifying the picture about them and sets the scene for what is researched. The second step is focused on the added value, which is also divided in two parts. The first part, deals with the concept of the added value as such and the added value of transnational cooperation on a second level. This crates the background for the empirical analysis chapter, where the added value of the EU macro-regional strategies will be analysed according to the available data. In the next and last step, having created this solid background, the arguments for or against a possible combination of the two cooperation forms will be developed, keeping in mind the information of steps 1 and two of the so far research and using the data collected for the research. As a result the empirical data and desk study data will be analysed in the according chapter, under the framework of the added value concept as well as the similarities and differences of the transnational cooperation forms.

Figure 2.3 Conceptual Framework

Baltic Sea/ Danube macro-regional strategy



### 3. Methodology

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In order to gain a better understanding of the concepts such as the 'added value' of the transnational cooperation and to be able later on to identify any arguments for or against a future possible combination of the two cooperation forms (the European Transnational Territorial Cooperation and the EU macro-regional strategies), a qualitative research approach has been chosen for this research. This chapter is dedicated in an integral part of the research: The methodology. Here the methodology of the research will be presented at first hand, together with the reasons for its choice. In addition, the research methods and the data collection will be explained and justified, setting the criteria for their selection. Special attention will be given on the validity reliability of the research findings, while some remarks on any difficulties encountered during the research will be discussed in the end of the chapter.

#### 3.1 Choice of the Methodology

Consulting the work of Saunders et al (2009) the methodology is defined as “the theory of how research should be undertaken, including the theoretical and philosophical assumptions upon which research is based and the implications of these for the *method or methods* (emphasis added) adopted” (pg.595), basically how the research objective of the research may be answered. As already mentioned this master thesis is based on a qualitative research approach. According to Bryman (1984) a "qualitative research is deemed to be much more fluid and flexible than quantitative research in that it emphasizes discovering novel or anticipating findings and the possibility of altering research plans in response to such serendipitous occurrences" (pg.77-78). Moreover, the study conducted for this master thesis will be an exploratory study. This means that the author will try to find out “what is happening; to seek new insights; to ask questions and to assess phenomena in a new light” (Robson, 2002:59, cited in Saunders et al, 2009, pg.139). As a result, the research strategies chosen for it, will be according to the formulation of an exploratory research. Hence to this, the master thesis constitutes a case study approach. The cases chosen are the Baltic Sea and the Danube region. The reason for this derives from the fact that the research investigates the (only) two existing EU macro-regional strategies, which are no other than the EU Baltic Sea and the Danube macro-regional strategy. Therefore, the according INTERREG B Programmes are focused on these regions and so also investigated. Bryman (2008) mentions that "a case study entails the detailed and intensive analysis of a single case", in that case of two, which actually are critical cases where "the researcher has a well developed theory, and case is chosen on the grounds that it will allow a better understanding of the circumstances in which the hypothesis will and will not hold" (pg.55). In the case of

this master thesis, we talk about a field study, due to the fact that the research was conducted in the two areas of study, something that serves in a better operationalisation of the research, and which field study lasted approximately three months (see *Table 3.4*).

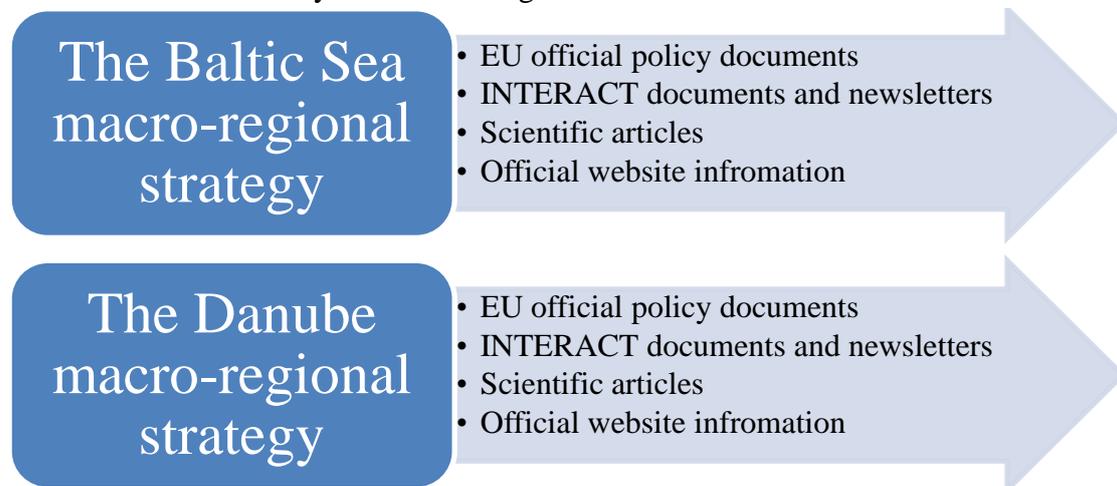
### 3.2 The Data collection

According to Saunders et al (2009), there are “three principal ways for conducting this kind of research: A search of the literature, interviewing ‘experts’ on the subject and conducting focus group interviews” (pg.140). This also applies in this research. The data collection methods for this master thesis have been on the one hand, a thorough desk study of relevant documents and literature, while on the other, a large number of semi-structured interviews, according to a question guide, has been carried out. The aim for this is to create a balanced base and the most accurate result.

#### 3.2.1 The desk study: The policy documents and literature review

The starting point of the desk study was the collection of any relevant documents around the topic as well as information from relevant internet websites, such official websites of the two EU macro-regional strategies or the INTERREG B Programmes. The latter was necessary to gain up-to-date information, regarding the fact that there is not a broad literature on the EU macro-regional strategies and they are mainly communicated through their official websites and INTERACT Points. This selection was divided in the following two main categories and : i) The Baltic Sea and ii) the Danube, each of which had the following sub-categories: i) EU official policy documents ii) INTERACT documents and newsletters iii) Scientific Articles iv) information from the official websites of the EU macro-regional strategies and the European Transnational Territorial Cooperation Programmes. The following table shows this categorisation (*Table 3.1*).

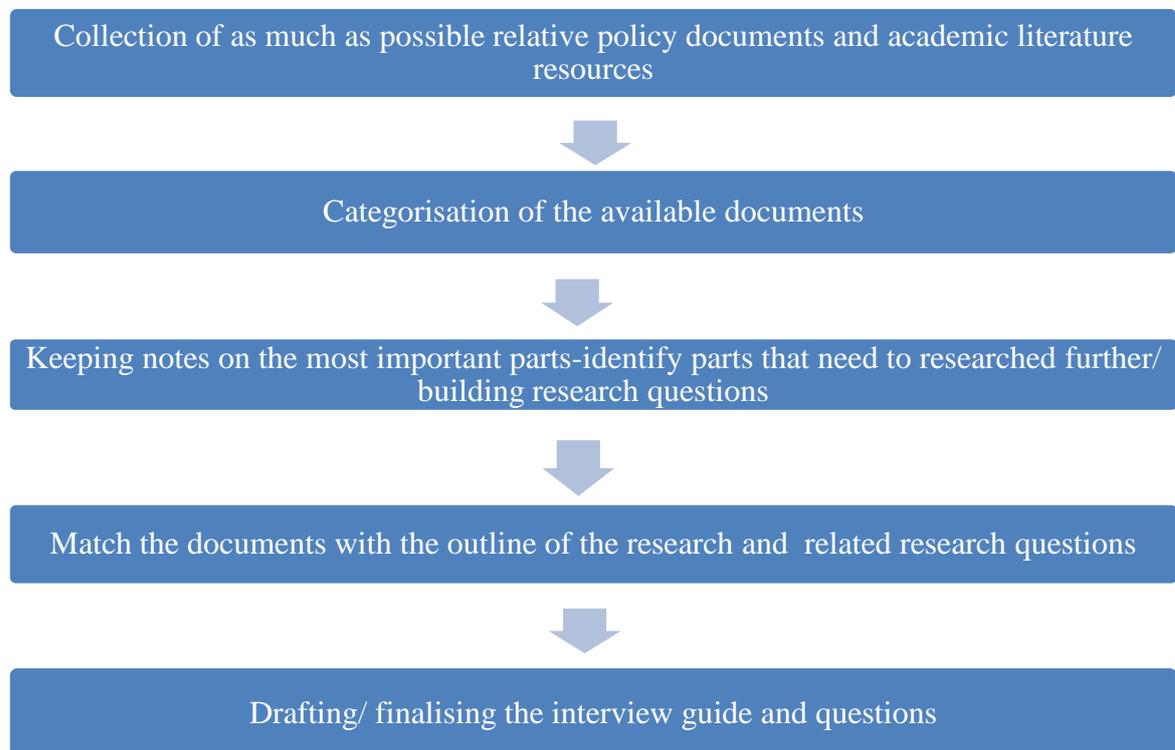
Table 3.1 The desk study resources categorisation



Source: Author's own

This categorisation served on the one hand to gain an in- depth knowledge, both in the field of the EU macro-regional strategies, as well as the INTERREG B Programmes, of the respective area. Moreover, it provides a more thorough approach, regarding that both the official policy context and the literature review has been studied. Through an extensive study of these documents, the critical choice of the most relevant has been made. The criterion for this was the relevance to the topic and in how far each document may constitute an 'eye-opener' for the research and its aims. As a result, it has been realised that the main context of the transnational cooperation in Europe will be described by the policy documents, i.e in order to describe, for example, the goals of the EU macro-regional strategies or the member states that take part, while the academic literature served mostly in the literature review. In this way, a more overall picture of the topic has been achieved. This policy and literature review served as a basis for the further research as well as the development of the questionnaire/ interview guide of the semi-structured interviews and the decision on the interview partners, since the deficits in relation to the topic of interest of this thesis, of the until today research were identified. The following scheme shows the procedure of the desk study.

Table 3.2 Desk study procedure



Source: Author's own

### 3.2.2 The semi-structured interviews

As Saunders et al (2009) explain, in the semi-structured interviews “the researcher will have a list of themes and questions to be covered, although this may vary from interview to interview” (pg.320), i.e. some questions may change depending on the interviewee, some may be omitted or added, the order may change, “depending [also] on the flow of the discussion [and] the specific organisational context that is encountered in relation to the research topic” (pg.320). For this master thesis there were conducted in total 27 interviews, all of which represent the opinion of the interview partner, keeping in mind their position. The questions focus on the EUMRS and the INTERREG B Programmes. A categorisation was also set for the interviews, according this time to the two EU macro-regional strategies space, since the questions were based on them. There they are as follows: i) EU Baltic Sea macro-regional strategy ii) EU Danube macro-regional strategy. These are again divided in the following three sub-categories: i) Decision making level representatives (DML) ii) Operational level representatives (OPL). The following table shows this categorisation.

Table 3.3 The interview partners' categorisation



Source: Author's own

For each research place, the interview partners were categorised in two main categories. This results in viewing the opinion of the stakeholders, both from the decision-making level, such as the European Commission and the European Parliament, as well as the operational level, as are the Priority Area Coordinators taking part in the EU macro-regional strategies. To the latter category belong representatives from the INTERREG B Programmes of the two regions, since they are part of the operationalisation of the Programmes. To this, belong in addition any consultancies which offer studies and are involved in the above. It has to be admitted though, that most of the actors come from the operational level, since they anyway constitute the actors' majority.

For the conduction of the research the author spent one month in the city of Vienna, Austria, and one in the city of Karlskrona, in Sweden, where inter alia had the chance to be an observant and participate as well in a conference with a relevant topic. The main criterion for the selection of the interview partners was their relation to the topic and their position. It is important for the research to have an overall and multifaceted picture of the topic and this may be done through the above categorisation. Another important notice is that the interview partners have a different country representation background: By this I mean that there were not interviewed representatives only from Austria and Sweden, but actors from several member states taking part in the EU macro-regional strategies and INTERREG B Programmes. The majority of the interviews were face to face, while some were also conducted via telephone or skype, due to distance difficulties, and only one per email. More specifically, for the Baltic Sea region there were in total four face to face and seven skype/ phone interviews and one done per email (4 DML, 8 OL- a sum of twelve). For the Danube there were eight face to face and two skype phone interviews (1 DML, 9 OL, one of which a group interview of two people, held face-to-face - a sum of ten). They all had a duration of approximately one hour, while for their realisation two research fields were done, one to Bratislava and one to Stockholm. The interviews were based on an interview guide, though due to their semi-structured character, they had a more 'discussion sense'. The interview questionnaire was divided into three general titles, which consisted of several related questions. These categories were: "achievements" (with questions mainly on the added value of the EU macro-regional strategies), "future" (with questions based on the future opportunities of the EU macro-regional strategies) and "possible combination" (on arguments for or against a possible combination) (*See appendix I& II*), under which the data/interview answers were categorised and analysed. The last five interviews were held face to face in the European Union quarters in Brussels and representatives from the European Parliament and European Commission were interviewed for the approximate time of 30 minutes. The opinions of these actors cannot be categorised in the regions, since some questions depending on the discussion of the interviews were more on both strategies. All interviews were held between September- December 2012.

Table 3.4 The research stages according to time

Time Period	Research Stage
<b>August 2012- September 2012</b>	Desk study: review of related policy documents and academic literature
<b>October 2012</b>	Field study in Vienna: Interviews for the EU Danube macro-regional strategies Field trip to Bratislava
<b>November 2012</b>	Field study in Karlskrona: Interviews for the EU Baltic Sea macro-regional strategy. Field trip to Stockholm
<b>First week of December 2012</b>	Field trip to Brussels for EU representatives interviews

Source: Author's own

### 3.3 The research methods and data collection according to the research questions and the research stages

At this point it might be useful to remind the main research question of the master thesis and provide in a comprehensive table the match of the selected data collection to the research questions, presenting at the same time the research procedure stages. The main research question of the master thesis is the following, as set in *page 13*:

**How can the added value of the two EU macro-regional strategies in relation to the existing transnational territorial cooperation programmes in these regions in Europe be conceptualised and what are their similarities and differences that may raise arguments supporting or preventing a possible combination in the future?**

Table 3.5 presents in a concentrated way the research methods and the data collection according to the research questions. It has to be noted that the research questions are interrelated, regarding that information found for the first sub-question were useful for the second one and so on, building a deductive reasoning until the last one.

Table 3.5 The match of the data collection according to the research questions

Research sub-questions	Research methods and way of analysis
How can transnational cooperation in Europe be conceptualised?	Desk study. Review of related policy documents and academic literature. Step 1: Describe the place of state of the transnational cooperation (chapter 1). Step 2: Build the theoretical and conceptual framework (chapter 2)
What are the similarities and differences of the different cooperation forms in these two regions?	Mainly desk study supported by interview partners' opinions. Analyse the opinions of the actors on the topic and support or contradict them through the available literature (chapter 4)
What are the similarities and differences of the different cooperation forms in these two regions?	Desk study and interview partners' opinions. Analyse the opinions of the actors on the topic and support or contradict them through the available literature
What could be the arguments for and against a future combination of the different cooperation forms?	A deductive approach, coming from the previous question and the responds of the actors, concerning relevant questions

Source: Author's own

### 3.4 Checking for the Validity and Reliability of the findings

One of the most important parts of a research the validity and reliability of the research results, and therefore special attention should be given to this i.e. the “extend to which [the] data collection techniques or analysing procedures will yield consistent findings” and “whether the findings are really about what they appear to about” respectively (Saunders et al, 2009, pg 156-157). Reliability focuses on whether the study results are repeatable, and validity, which concern the integrity, on criteria (Bryman, 2008,pg.31) in order to get an accurate result and be able to analyse the data. To this, it is useful to talk about the concept of triangulation which is a method for checking the validity. Denzin (1970) is one of the who , defined triangulation as the "use of multiple methods", a "combination of methods and investigators in the same study", it is a "plan of action that will raise sociologists above the personalistic biases that stem from single methodologies"(pg. 300). By this method combination, the researchers "can partially overcome the deficiencies that flow from one investigator or/and one method" (ibid). Furthermore, Denzin(1970) identifies four types of triangulation, some of which are also applicable in this master thesis. He talks about "*data triangulation* (entailing the types of time, space and person and the levels of aggregate, interactive and collectivity (person) ), *investigator* (multiple vs. single observers of the same object), *theory* (multiple vs. single perspectives in relation to the same set of objects) and *methodological* (within and between method triangulation)" (ibid, pg.301). The data triangulation, may be said, that is achieved regarding that the research was undertaken in two different places (the Baltic Sea and the Danube region), under several people coming from different countries and working on different sectors. This served in observing the situation and having interviews face to face, observing the reactions of the partners as well. Gathering information on the opinions of several actors, either being part in the decision making procedure or the operational level, gives a clearer picture. Moreover, the combination of the data collection leads to the same result: A thorough desk study and review of the available literature, together with the interview collected data, help identify the validity of the results.

Certainly, the responds of the interview partners are based on their opinions and one could claim that this could threaten the reliability of the research, since their opinion may be influenced by the position they have and the interests they promote. It is true, that the professional position plays an important role in people's opinion. The partners come from different backgrounds and are all greatly involved in the field of transnational cooperation either in European Programmes or in the intergovernmental cooperation and having positions either in ministries or national authorities, organisations and institutions (*see Appendix II*).However, through the anonymity kept for the interviewees and their willingness to talk about the issue has eased this. In addition to this, the fact that the interviews were not recorded, but notes were kept instead, resulted in the openness of the interview partners. Moreover, the literature and theoretical framework for the research have proved useful in cultivating an

objective result. Another difficulty that should be noticed at this stage is the fact that not so many interview partners from the decision making level were found, either due to their heavy agendas, or due to the fact that in each research region there were specific people being engaged in the topic and therefore the majority was suggesting one or two. For example, in the case of Vienna, when searching for interview partners from the high political level, who are part of the decision making level, and while asking other relevant interview partners, for representatives of this level, the majority pointed one or two specific people, since they were the ones more suitable for this research topic. Moreover, representatives of the high political level of mostly newer EU member states, did not respond to an interview invitation. Important it is also to mention that the language of the interviews were two: English and German, due to the fact that the interviews for the Danube region during my stay in Vienna were held in German, the official country language. A translator was not needed, since the author is a proficient user of the language, though since English is the language of the thesis, this language difference plays a role. What could be furthermore mentioned is the difference of the two regions in terms of their planning and political culture. By this, it is meant the fact that the Nordic countries, such as Sweden, are usually more open to talk, though Central or Eastern European countries less, mainly due to their history. This is to be seen from the answers of the interview partners, when analysing the data, regarding that the representative of the Baltic Sea macro-region were dominating the discussion. This fact has been taken into account, and to the more accurate result of the research has helped the anonymity kept.

During a research there are always difficulties and factors that may threaten the validity and the reliability of the research. Especially in a qualitative research which is based on opinions and not on quantitative results, this may be more obvious. However, the difficulties mentioned above, do not constitute a big threat for the quality of the research results.

## **4. What new do the EU macro-regional strategies have to offer? Their added value in relation to the other existing transnational cooperation forms and arguments for and against a possible combination**

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**A**fter having thoroughly discussed the context of the research, the theoretical approaches around it as well as the methodology that is used for it, this chapter will be used for presenting the findings of the research, in relation to the main research question and the sub-questions set in the introduction. This chapter will be divided in three parts. The first one, analyses the added value of the EU macro-regional strategies, taking sources from the available literature, supporting them by the empirical findings. The second part, will look through the similarities and differences of the transnational cooperation forms presented in this thesis, which would set the scene and lead to the last, third part, the arguments for and against a possible combination of the transnational cooperation forms.

### **4.1 The added value of the EU macro-regional strategies**

Since their beginning, the EU macro-regional strategies have created a macro-regional fever, taking into account that many countries wish either to create or be part of one. There are already discussions about a creation of a macro-regional strategy for the Mediterranean and the Alpine space, while changes in the European Transnational Territorial Cooperation Programmes are to be seen in order to fit with the current EU macro-regional changes, as in the Danube region for example. On the other hand, we can see the tendency in the European Union, for more visible, controlled and strategic planning in general. But what is this in relation to the existing transnational cooperation forms that the EU macro-regional strategies have to offer? Through the desk study for this research and through consulting and presenting the results of the interviews, there will be given an answer on the added value of the EU macro-regional strategies through the literature and the opinions of stakeholders.

Schymik (2011) underlines that the success of the macro-regional strategies cannot yet be identified, due to the fact that there are some shortcomings to be observed; to this more time is required to be able to judge whether they have passed the test of a successful implementation or not. For the CPMR (2010), there are two lessons to be learned from the current macro-regional strategies' achievements: It is regarded as more efficient, if any new macro-regional strategies or even the already existing ones, emerged at the same time as the discussions for the new programming periods for the territorial cooperation were set. According to Dubois et al (2009), the added value of the EU macro-regional strategies on European territorial cooperation is visible through the promotion of "cross-border and transnational cooperation", focusing on "territorial cooperation", and offering a "new way of thinking about

4. What new do the EU macro-regional strategies have to offer? Their added value in relation to the existing transnational cooperation forms and arguments for and against a possible combination

multi-level governance and subsidiarity" (pg.9). This is mainly based on the fact that there are many actors from different levels taking part in the Strategies. Besides, EU macro-regional strategies "may function as a bridge between the European Neighbourhood Policy and Territorial Development Policies" (ibid), since a variety of countries, both EU and non-EU members take part. According to Dühr (2011), "it is argued that the strengths of the EU macro-regional strategies are the high-level of political commitment and the wide involvement of EU and national institutions in their development and implementation" (pg.1). Although no new institutions are foreseen, there are some governance structures required (Dühr 2011), while whether the issue of becoming their own funding, although it has been under discussion, nothing has been realised yet. For Dubois et al (2009), a macro-regional strategy is "an integrated framework' that provides the necessary policy support to achieve this kind of cooperation"(pg.24). The same opinion hold Braun and Kovács (nd), mentioning that the macro-regional strategies can be used as an "important instrument to deepen integration and strengthen territorial cooperation" (pg.80). The same opinion supports Dühr (2011), saying that the EU macro-regional strategies act as "models to achieve territorial cohesion, the integration of sector policies and the coordination of actors at different levels of governance, making better use of existing resources to achieve common objectives", creating a new framework for "speeding up the process of spatial integration of the regions in the European Union (Dühr,2011, pg. 3; and also Dubois et al, 2009,pg.25). Moreover, there is an expectation that macro-regional strategies will contribute to achieving the EU's high-level political objectives, such as is expressed in the Europe 2020 strategy (EC, 2010, pg.12). Stead(2011) also underlines the importance of the role that the macro-regional strategies may play for the future EU regional policy beyond 2013 (pg.163). Stocchiero (2011), argues that the macro-regional strategies, do not only foster a better use of the existing resources and institutions, but also constitute a "political experiment", representing a new "governance level" (pg.3) 'located between the nation state and the supranational community' "(Schymik and Peer,2009, in Stocchiero, 2011 pg.3). Concluding, Stocchiero (2011) highlights that the success of the macro-regional strategies will be based on the "political will of the member states and the political will of the third states" (pg.12, also Dühr, 2011, pg.38). Nevertheless, the link of the macro-regional strategies to the EU policies, by providing "political support to current initiatives and [raising] their visibility" (EC, 2010, pg.12), and their relationship to EU funding for transnational cooperation under the INTERREG programmes has not been sufficiently researched to date. This becomes particularly interesting in relation to the current proposals for the future EU Cohesion Policy 2014-2020, and the role of territorial cooperation therein. The EU's Fifth Cohesion Report highlighted the importance of "putting particular emphasis on the macro-regional strategies" for the future territorial cohesion (EC, pg. XXVIII), while "support for macro-regional strategies is to be an investment priority for transnational cooperation programmes" (CoR,2012, pg.13). According to an INTERACT Point representative, their added value lies in the fact that is a new top-down mechanism,

4. What new do the EU macro-regional strategies have to offer? Their added value in relation to the existing transnational cooperation forms and arguments for and against a possible combination

where people come together in order to cooperate, which in other case they would not. The fact that through the EUMRS a cooperation framework has been set up where people meet in order to cooperate and which was not the case until, is considered as one of the achievements of the Strategies by the actors as well [EU-IP1, 3, 5]. Not only in a more strategic, but also in a more coherent way do the MRS work, something that the INTERREG Programmes have not [EU- IP 4]. In addition, the EUMRS managed to mobilise the political level of the member states in establishing this "cooperation platform", which creates a "political space", bringing countries together [EU- IP 3, 5]. However, the difference of the two transnational cooperation forms is distinguished: INTERREG is a "structural funding programme, limited in thematic and types of projects" while the MRS are more strategic and the EU Cohesion Policy is more to be seen; they are a "policy framework" for the implementation of the objectives of the EU 2020 in a macro-region [EU-IP 1].

#### **4.1.1 The EU Baltic Sea macro-regional strategy and its added value**

Taking a closer look at each region, the macro-regional strategy for the Baltic Sea has been expected with high hopes. Not only due to the fact that it would address the most important challenges, opportunities and problems of the region, which concern mainly the environment, especially the marine, the region connection, the economy and cohesion, and the security, but also because it is seen as a model for a new governmental level in the EU (Schymik, 2009). Therefore, it is seen as very important for the countries' cooperation in general by all interview partners [BS IP1-12], either to receive more funding for the projects of a country as well, as Poland for example [BS-ID 7] or to raise awareness about it (ibid). Armali et al (nd) deduce the importance of the Baltic Sea Strategy, to the fact the sea is the focal point of the area, not only for its economic power, but also for its environmental added value; therefore the priorities set by the Strategy are wisely chosen (the latter was also stressed by Schymik, (2009), while the importance of a stronger participation of Russia is also mentioned, due to the fact that it is not only an important economic and market global player, but also a great energy supplier of the region and of the EU in general. Apart from the three no's prerequisites, the two main objectives of the strategy were to include "all actors and to involve national partners actively, and to exploit the existing institutions and finance", so a better coordination of all actors is necessary (ibid.pg.23) and this constitutes an added value. In the report, they conclude by summarising the importance of the Strategy in the following main points: Firstly, they see the Baltic Sea macro-regional strategy as the first EU approach of cooperation that is possible to extend to further regions, secondly, the Strategy is seen as a means of better using the existing funds, of connecting the EU policies with those of the Strategy, while respecting the sovereignty of the countries, and to provoke countries to look beyond their frontiers, through promoting cooperation with EU- member and non- member states, with the wider goal of promoting "regional development, which

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seeks to be integrative, inclusive and follows a multilevel governance approach" (ibid pg.25). However, it is true that the Strategy engages different governmental levels, which is of great importance, though it is the "EU itself [which] is allocated a key position in the process of formulating a strategy, although at the same time it is bound to do so by engaging itself in a dialogue with various other relevant actors, such as states of the regions, certain sub-national units..and a variety of region-specific organisations" (Joenniemi, 2009, pg.1). Through the Strategy, intergovernmental organisations, as VASAB and HELCOM have come closer and cooperate and this is actually seen as an advantage, while the fact that HELCOM takes part raises the visibility of the Strategy [BS- IP7]. This was not the case before, since the responsibilities of each organisation was clearly divided. Concluding, the macro-regional strategy for the Baltic Sea, would serve as the first example of this type, useful to address common policies, letting the countries decide themselves on the issues at hand, under the EU umbrella, underlying on the other hand the potential of the Strategy to be further extended and developed and play a more active and integrated role in the EU's policies (Joenniemi, 2009).

Although the majority of the actors interviewed about the Baltic Sea macro-regional strategy claimed that in general there is a lot expected from the EU macro-regional strategies, regarding the big number of priorities they have, most of them agreed on one: Despite the fact that they did not start in the beginning of a funding period, so that a better alignment of it would have been achieved, this period served as a testing period. Therefore, the stakeholders seem more prepared for the next one, taking advantage of everything that has been achieved during the last funding period. Considering the above on the added value, in some came also the actors to agree. BS-IP 1, stresses that the greatest achievement of the EU Baltic Sea macro-regional strategy has been the better coordination of all the actors, of the challenges and strategic goals, as well as EU policies in the region. And actually the fact that all activities concerning the region have been coordinated and come together. To the better coordination and cooperation of activities agrees BS-IP 6 and 7 as well, mentioning though that it is too early to talk about results. In addition, through the EU Baltic Sea macro-regional strategy the regional cooperation has increased and the EU policies are better coordinates; and this improvement is to be seen [BS-IP 7]. Another opinion on the added value of the EU Baltic Sea macro-regional strategy is that now a broad and strategic cooperation was needed, something that was not the case before [BS-IP 11]. The argument of Dühr (2011) that one of the core strengths of the EUBSR is the political commitment is also supported by some stakeholders. The political support is widely considered as an added value [BS-IP 2,3,4,8,9,10,12]. The INTERREG Programmes do not work so coherent and are not "politically confirmed" [BS-IP 3]. The EU support acts as an advantage for the political support as well, since nation states can "survive" easier any ups and downs of the Strategy [BS-IP 4]. It is considered as a "political framework" [BS-IP8] and brought political weight in the way of the so far cooperation (together with a more strategic way in the EU money

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use) [BS-IP12]. Hence to this, the raise of political importance is regarded as an achievement and the governmental cooperation is important, besides the fact that there is a development in the cooperation and projects to be observed after the Strategy implementation [BS-IP10]. "Politicians and decision makers understood that there is a need for 'governance level' between EU and national/ national- regional level" [D- IP5]. Additionally, it is underlined that the MRS power lies in this cooperation building and bringing together interests (ibid). In general, the political support the EUSBSR has gained has by none seen negatively. It is regarded as a way of showing the importance of the Strategy, it eases the implementation of projects, it gives them more importance and raises the awareness on the EUSBSR [BS- IP2,10]. Moreover, due to the achievements that the Strategy has, it may be used by the political level to its voters as tool and argument for tackling common challenges and bringing results [DS-IP1]. Certainly, the alignment of policies, of funding and the cooperation is considered an added value by an [BS-IP8], however, in order to overcome any problems, such as resistance of the Programmes' actors, the political support is needed.

But could we say that there was something missing from the existing INTERREG B Programmes? The EU Baltic Sea macro-regional strategy includes almost all EU activities with a special focus on environment, which is not so much underlined by the INTERREG, which focuses on specific priorities [BS- IP1]. This coordination and harmonisation of the priorities is also considered as an advantage of the EUSBSR in relation to the INTERREG, by BS- IP3, although the interview partner considers both as different. Moreover, it is stressed that the MRS has a clearer focus on what needs to be done. Furthermore, the EUSBSR projects pay more attention on the visibility of the projects after their end, through the steering committees, though the INTERREG Programmes fund individual projects [BS-IP 6]. Last but not least, from BS- IP12's point of view, the MRS in relation to the INTERREG Programme managed to bring together more the governance levels instead of the regional and they encourage cooperation there were the political support is needed, building in a relationship of trust.

Concerning the EUSBSR, the main arguments for its added value in relation to the INTERREG transnational Programmes may be summed up as follows. On the one hand, we have a more strategic framework, where all issues that are important for the region are addressed, instead of just specific objectives and on the other it offers a coordinated approach in the EU policies implementation. The promotion of cooperation upon interests and common challenges is another argument. Moreover, the greater participation of certain intergovernmental organisation on transnational cooperation, as the VASAB and HELCOM and their cooperation, are seen as an advantage and increase the visibility of the Strategy. Lastly, of course the commitment and involvement of the political level, has been seen as an added value and achievement of the EUSBSR in relation to INTERREG B. For the first time, the

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high political level and not only the regional level, as in the INTERREG B, is taking actively part in the cooperation and implementation of the EU policies in the region.

#### **4.1.2 The EU Danube macro-regional strategy and its added value**

Giffinger and Suitner (2010) stress that the Danube region is characterised by "a divergent group of countries concerning the process of integration and the preconditions in geographic, economic, cultural and socio-demographic terms" (pg.9). Therefore territorial cohesion is considered as one of the most important challenges (ibid). Despite the fact that the EU throughout its policies has taken several steps towards these topics, there can still be progress: Antypas (nd) proposes that a macro-regional strategy can "foster a sense of common responsibility by directing funding to cooperative projects, cross-border protection measures, and sharing best practices,... for an enhanced capacity for collective action aimed at basin-wide environmental protection as well as sustainable development, especially in rural areas"; this may be achieved through "key pillars which should be developed through a stakeholder engagement process" (pg.5). On the other hand, the Danube region is a region, which takes part in many organisations that play the role of promoting cooperation and integration<sup>4</sup>. Busek and Gjoreska (2010) are positive towards the Danube macro-regional strategy especially for the integration of the countries; they see it as "an offered opportunity for the transformation of the existing Danube Region into a more specific, concrete and comprehensive cooperation framework for ... the integration of all the relevant actors and initiatives in a more visible and transparent space of cooperation and coexistence" (pg.19). In addition, they stress that the idea of the Danube macro-region does not only opens the floor for cultivating further the creating macro-regions in the EU for promoting the EU territorial cooperation policy, but also for engaging stronger more levels of actors, such as regional, local and national authorities, and for realising that "for the EU, the Danube region will be an opportunity to create a unified mechanism to push forward integration and enlargement policies, to use EU structural and cohesion funds in a more effective way and to achieve better results in terms of cohesion on the long run" (pg.17-18). We should keep in mind that in terms of cooperation, the Danube region is among the key areas for the EU development, regarding that 18 out of 52 in total cross-border cooperation programmes are situated in the region, the same for 3 of the 13 transnational programmes; therefore the position of the region is strategic (Boneva, nd, pg.75). Focusing more on the energy issue, Boneva (nd), argues that despite the fact that the Strategy will not be granted further funding, it "encourages coordination

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<sup>4</sup> Among those organisations are: the Stability Pact for South East Europe and the South East European Cooperative Initiative, the Danube Cooperation Process, the International Commission for the Protection of the Danube River, the Danube International Commission, the Institute for the Danube and Central Europe, the South East European Transport Observatory, the South East European Regional Environmental Centre, the SEE Research Network (Busek, Gjoreska, 2010, pg.13)

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among the participating countries for the use of the existing financial schemes and creates momentum for the implementation of projects of regional importance in the energy sector...[where the member-states of the Strategy themselves] have the chance to define their priority energy projects that will be developed at national level or in cooperation with other countries" (pg.81). As a result, this will not only lead to a better organising and using the available energy resources, but also to the creation of more work places and "business opportunities for local companies and foreign investors in the region", having in the end a positive effect regarding cohesion (ibid.pg.82). The importance of setting down priorities and actions for the environmental protection of the region, the promotion of the cooperation to the East through technology, innovation and economic development, the creation of more job opportunities for the young people, through education, as well as new governmental structures are also highlighted in the NCP Flash Newsletter (2011).

In comparison to the Baltic Sea which already dates more or less three years, the Danube macro-regional strategy was initiated in the very end of the previous funding period. Therefore, the added value of the first was easier to be identified by the interview partners. For the actors in the Danube region the added value was not clear yet, mainly due to the short time of its existence, as also D-IP 5 stresses, and there are not yet any great results to be seen. This opinion is also shared by D-IP 3 and 4, who support that despite the fact that the Danube macro-regional strategy looks as a interesting approach for cooperation, there have not yet been many projects so that we can talk about results, since this will take some years. They also agree upon the fact that the EUSDR managed to bring "high political commitment" and this increased the interest of the stakeholders. It is not only the support of the national political level that may be regarded as an added value, but also the European Commission support [D-IP 7]. This awareness raising has not only occurred among the political, but in general: through the Strategy people "think bigger" about the region and feel commitment about it [D-IP-2]. Another important factor that the EUSDR has underlined is the importance of the newer member states, as well as of accession countries. Through the EUSDR, they have the chance to play a more active role, since accession countries have now the opportunity to participate in meetings and relatively new member states can have a more active role [D-IP 7, D-IP 8]. Nevertheless, the ultimate added value of the EU macro-regional strategy in the Danube, is the cooperation and cohesion itself [D-IP 2, 7,8,9]. Although this is difficult to achieve [D-IP 2], this is the common initiative to achieve [D-IP 7], new networks are built, which are useful for the future common preparation of any projects [D-IP 8], while there is also a know how transfer and technical know-how transfer among the member states [EU- IP3]. Member states, cooperate now on specific targets, as they are set in the action plan and are focused on them and on their specific deadlines [D-IP 9]. In contrast to the Baltic Sea MRS, for the Danube MRS, there has also been mentioned another argument as an added value: the fact of identity building. People gradually develop a common "Danube identity", they feel that they belong to

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the Danube [D- IP1, 2 and 9] and any intercultural or administrative boundaries are being set aside. In relation to their INTERREG Programmes, the EUSDSR managed to take a closer look to the European integration, especially for the newer member states [D- IP 1]: Taking the example of Croatia, which will access the EU in 2013, its participation in the Danube macro-regional strategy, will achieve a better integration, since the feeling of belonging to a common place (in this case the Danube) with the other member states will make a step to this (ibid). This reflects the argument stressed in the theoretical chapter as well, where one reason for the cooperation of the member states was their better integration to the EU. Both D-IP 3 and 4, as well as D-IP 3 distinguish that the INTERREG transnational cooperation programmes and the EU Danube macro-regional strategy are two different things: INTERREG Programmes are funding programmes [D-IP 3], while the EUSDSR is a "cooperation mechanism" [D-IP 4], which the Programmes may offer assistance.

Certainly, the Baltic and the Danube are two different regions, in terms of countries, of needs and of cooperation structures and traditions. Despite the fact that both regions are characterised by an East-West division, the Baltic Sea has cultivated stronger cooperation bonds and is more homogenic, in contrast to the Danube region, which despite its cooperation structures, the differences of the countries make it difficult to reduce strong disparities. Here lies another so far achievement of the EUMRS, which through their more coherent approach managed to make the East-West integration easier. However, in the topic of the added value of the Strategy in each region, the cooperation factor is the most agreed upon, showing that countries do want to cooperate. Either this could be for the prosperity of the neighbours and therefore better trading circumstances for the countries' economies [B-IP 4] or for a better EU integration. Moreover, the creation of a more strategic and coherent transnational cooperation form, which focuses on specific targets, addressing specific region challenges, has been seen as an added value. This more coherent approach, based on interests and cooperation is supported both by actors from the decision making level, as well from the operational level. Moreover, it depicts the general shift of the EU, the need for more strategic and visible projects. The mobilisation of greater involvement of the political level is also be seen by the majority of the actors. Projects (especially from newer members) are now easier to be launched [D-IP 8], and to be promoted [BS -IP 2]. This newer members' more active role in the strategy, can facilitate a yearlong effort: The East- West integration of countries in the European Union, leading again to EU integration. The above arguments, reflect more or less the arguments addressed by Dubois (2009) and Dühr (2011). What is not reflected there, is the cultural distance of the Strategy. Culture plays an important role as well: The Danube river is strongly related to the culture of some cities, such as Vienna and this makes the willingness to build a Danube identity even stronger. Newer member states may cultivate this feeling as well, and share the idea of belonging somewhere in common, cooperating for the needs of their region and facilitating this way their integration as well. So besides the networking development, countries have started

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now to "think bigger" as already mentioned, in a macro-regional level. what should also be mentioned is the role of Russia, which is also necessary for the region's cooperation. All interview partners admitted that Russia is a key player and its involvement in the EUSBSR is very important. Its participation is crucial for tackling in common environmental issues, as the pollution of the Baltic Sea, [BS- IP 1,3, 7,9] as well as for improving the countries' relations [BS- IP 2,3]. Nevertheless, the two transnational cooperation forms do have both differences and similarities. Considering the so far desk study and empirical analysis, some of them will be traced out.

#### **4.2 Where may the future of the EU macro-regional strategy depend? An actors' perspective.**

Before proceeding to the last part of the thesis and in order to draw a better picture of the arguments around the a possible combination of the EU macro-regional strategies and the European Transnational Cooperation Programmes, it would useful to see first how the actors of both macro-regional strategies view the future of the EUMRS and their opinion on the factors that many influence the future of the EU macro-regional strategies. This will help in shaping in mind the role of the EUSMRS that the actors themselves see for the Strategies and therefore of identifying some arguments on a possible combination. After some general remarks on the future of the macro-regional strategies, the opinions of the actors of each Strategy on the topic, will be presented.

Considering the future of the EU macro-regional strategies, Dirk Ahner (2011, DG REGIO) expects to see " a greater role for macro-regional strategies and for transnational programmes". Reviewing the EU's Fifth Cohesion Report, the importance of "putting particular emphasis on the macro-regional strategies" for the future territorial cohesion (EC, pg. XXVIII) is highlighted, while "support for macro-regional strategies is to be an investment priority for transnational cooperation programmes" (CoR,2012, pg.13). According to the EU, the future of the EU macro-regional strategies looks promising, since the cooperation and cohesion policy is actually built upon regions. The future EU Cohesion Policy is influenced by the Europe 2020 Agenda, under which a smart, sustainable and inclusive growth should be delivered. For the coming funding period, 2014-2020, there are some changes in the transnational cooperation to be seen, which play an important role for the EU macro-regional strategies. In general, there are changes to be seen in the transnational cooperation, a "push for more thematic approaches and clear objectives" [D-IP 10]. According to EU-IP 5, a new Transnational Territorial Cooperation Programme will be developed, the Danube Programme, which will cover the area of the Danube macro-regional strategy. This change gives attention to the 'labelling' idea, where the Programme and the macro-regional strategy in the same region are identically formed and share the same naming, as is the case for the *Baltic Sea* Programme and the *Baltic*

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*Sea* macro-regional strategy. This labelling would be useful in terms of financial reasons [EU- IP 2] and of an easier identification of the Danube Strategy by the people [EU-IP 5]. But what role can play this and other factors mentioned for the future?

#### **4.2.1 Actors' views on the future of the EU Baltic Sea macro-regional strategy**

All the actors interviewed do see a future for the EUMRS and are optimistic about it. EU- IP 1 stresses that the EUMRS will play a more active role and be "embedded in the new Cohesion Policy, while EU- IP 3 continues saying that it "will be good" to integrated them in the next programming period. The future of the EUMRS will "depend on the commitment of the political level, on the level of mature cooperation in the region and the will of the implementation level". The involvement and ownership of the member states is necessary for the future of the EUMRS, since the role of the European Commission should gradually decrease [EU- IP5]. EU- IP 3 talks about the necessity of the actors' commitment and points the ability of the member states to realise projects and make them visible as important for the future. However, concrete measures for concrete projects should be set[ibid]. EU- IP 4 is also optimistic for the future, since the EUMRS provide another way for economic growth, "above national borders" which is a step to a more federal Europe. For D-IP 1, the future of the Strategies will depend on the European Commission support and the decisions of the Council. A lot will also depend on the "understanding of the national level, to promote collaboration and collective thinking", as well as on the engagement of the governmental levels [BS-IP 12].

The actors' arguments on the factors where the EU macro-regional strategies may depend on, do not differ much between the Baltic Sea and the Danube macro-regional strategy, while support that there is a stronger role for the EUMRS to be seen. Most of them are converged to the commitment and the results of the projects, however, let us take a closer look. Considering the Baltic Sea, the fact that the EUBSR is good cooperation platform and even more engages member states on cooperation to achieve specific targets, will certainly continue existing [BS-IP 1]. Moreover, a stronger link to the INTERREG B Programme is also expected for the future [ibid] and here is where according to BS-IP 2, their future may depend on: On the "political framework to adjust the programme to the Strategy". The political support, the EU institutions' support, the regions' support and in general the stakeholders' support is an opinion that several actors share [BS-IP 3, 4, 5, 6, 10]. Certainly, the Strategy may have its "ups and downs" but since both the operational as well as the decision making levels are enthusiastic and interested about the Strategy, then it will have a future [BS- IP 4]. What, however, needs to be done in the future is a more qualified staff working for the Strategy and as well as a high political support [ibid]. BS- IP 7 agrees that the political support is necessary for the future of the EUBSR, adding that special attention should also be given in the "proper use of the

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output" and the future bigger challenges that have to be faced. BS-IP 10 underlines that the actors themselves is actually the factor where the future of the EUSBSR will be based. Their commitment has to stay as high and intense as it is at present, so that the EU macro-regional strategies be active players in the transnational cooperation arena of the future.

#### **4.2.2 Actors' views on the future of the EU Danube macro-regional strategy**

Considering the Danube macro-regional strategy, there is a difference to be noted and was also mentioned before: The 'labelling' fact. For the Baltic Sea Strategy it is a given state and therefore not considered that important. Actors understand its added value character, since it may help for the Strategy implementation [BS-IP 1], for creating the "feeling of connection" [BS-IP 3]. On the other hand, this does not happen in the Danube macro-regional strategy, the region of which is covered by two different Transnational Territorial Cooperation Programmes, the Central Europe and South East Europe Programme. Therefore, the labelling is broadly seen as an advantage, and a strategic advantage of the EUSBSR, which could also bring more impulse and easier identification of the topics and projects to the region of the Danube [D-IP 6, 9]. Moreover, it may increase the visibility and coordination in the region, however it is not so easy to be launched [D- IP 3/4]. This was easier for the Baltic Sea due to its geography and participant counties, which made the identification easier [ibid]. While for other actors, labelling does not seem so important since the SEE Programme exists, will bring though an "administrative relief" [D-IP 5]. For D-IP 1, labelling is considered as really important, since there are overlapping regions between the Programmes and the EUSDSR, and it may influence the visibility of the Strategy. Apart from the labelling, the same actor supports that the EUSDSR will influence the future Programmes, however, it has to be promoted, and for this a strong lobbying is necessary. The results of the projects is something that should be taken into account for the future of the EUSDSR, according to BS-IP 5, since it is too early to see them yet. To this argument agree both D- IP 8 and 7, with the latter adding to it the commitment of the political level and the marking of the EUSDSR from the general ideas of the European Union, as is solidarity. Moreover, the communication of the programme's non-funding character is also considered important for the future, and the three NOs should be kept as are [D-IP 5, 9]. Nevertheless, it is hopeful that the EUSDSR will influence the next programming period, since it is important to address common topics collectively, help the region and get to know its macro-regional problems better [D- IP 7, 9]. Nevertheless the EUSDSR "has a chance to be very important for the region" [D-IP 8].

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### **4.3 May a future combination of the EU Macro-regional Strategies and the European Transnational Territorial Cooperation be possible? Arguments supporting or preventing this possibility**

Having until now analysed the data concerning issues such as the added value of the EU macro-regional strategies in relation to the INTERREG B Programmes and some factors on which, according to the actors, their future may depend on, in this last section of the chapter, the arguments for or against a future possible combination will be presented. These arguments are the result of a deductive reasoning of the research so far. Starting with the actors' opinion on both macro-regional strategies, the section will be divided afterwards in two, one for each EUMRS, where again the views of the stakeholders on a possibility of a combination will be shown. After this, the arguments for or against will be summed up, following the deductive reasoning.

Representative of the European Union made clear from the beginning that the Transnational Territorial Cooperation Programmes and the EU macro-regional strategies are two different things [EU-IP 1,2,3,4]. Therefore, they are two "incomparable things" since the INTERREG is a "financial instrument", while a macro-regional strategy is a strategy to help the region [EU-IP 1], it is actually a "framework" [EU-IP 2], which has a different approach to the INTERREG B Programmes [EU-IP 3]; the EUMRS are a "structure, while the INTERREG is cooperation" [EU-IP 4]. This differentiation of the two is supported by more stakeholders. D-IP 1, 5 and 6 and BS-IP 4, and 10 underline that the INTERREG B and the EUMRS are two different things, while D-IP 3& 4 and BS-IP 5 strongly underline their difference, mentioning that the two cooperation forms cannot be combined [D-IP 3], regarding the EUMRS are not a funding mechanism, but a coordinating one [ibid] and the INTERREG B Programme a financial instrument [BS-IP 5]. Regarding that the Strategies offer a more holistic approach, covering all EU policies and having a broader focus and an efficient approach, they are "too big for a Programme" [EU-IP 2]. Therefore a combination might be difficult [ibid]. What can be done, though, is a better interlinkage between them as much as possible in the future; this can be explained due to the fact that what is to be noticed in the future is the "more strategic focus", the "thematic focus", the "focus on results and outputs" [EU-IP 1], as well a "better use of everything" [EU-IP 2] and these may operate better through an interlinkage. This combination might actually be a "boost", the fact of building in the future upon interests, however the INTERREG Programmes will certainly continue existing [EU-IP 4]. The INTERREG will not only continue existing, but its role will also be augmented, supports EU-IP 3, who sees as an advantage the gradual change in transnational cooperation, which is based on interests. The idea of a possible combination seems interesting to EU-IP 5, who stresses however that this is not soon to be seen, if so, it may evolve after Europe 2020. Since the Strategy is bigger, the Programmes should be in the Strategy, the objectives of each other can therefore be matched with each other and may be

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complementary. On the other hand, since there is a shift to a more strategic change and regarding that the INTERREG B Programmes have reached a maturity stage, then maybe it is time for more strategic results [BS-IP 12]. A possible future combination might depend on the "effort", on "collaboration, coordination and decision making", and both sides have to be aware of the advantages and disadvantages of it [ibid]. As an example of advantages, it is mentioned the good practices transfer and the strategic association with the Programmes, however the EUMRS need more funding in order to bring more results.

#### **4.3.1 Argumentation on a possible (or not) combination of the INTERREG B Programme and the EU macro-regional strategy in the Baltic Sea**

The plan of combining the two cooperation forms in the Baltic Sea is not foreseen by the European Union, despite the long cooperation in the region and the labelling of the two. Nevertheless, stakeholders suggest that the two forms should be more interlinked. "They have to benefit from each other" points BS-IP 2, who suggests that Programmes may be used for the short term period, since Programmes last for only six years, though the strategy is under a long-term basis and is politically approved without having the procedure of budgetary and objectives' negotiations. Moreover, the two cooperation forms have to address each other and the INTERREG Programmes have to take into consideration the EUSBSR in the future [BS-IP 3]. A merging of the two cannot be argued, though "a better harmonisation can be said for the future" [ibid]. If enough money may be found in the future for the EUSBSR, then maybe the Programmes might not be needed anymore, since they will complement the programme, something which is very difficult to be done [ibid]. For BS-IP 4, the INTERREG is mainly seen as an instrument to implement the EUSBSR, regarding that the Strategy is better integrated and is broader, though the Programme is not so integrated in the mainstream policies. A combination is difficult to be seen, since the INTERREG Programmes will continue existing, "it is a machinery for money", though if the political support of the EUSBSR stops then they will stop as well [ibid]. "My idea would be to stop the Baltic Sea Programme and put money instead in the Baltic Sea macro-regional strategy", BS-IP 4 concludes. BS-IP 9, believes that it would be advisable to combine the two cooperation forms, due to the fact that they deal with the same territory and are overlapping with each other. Due to this, in case of a combination, the creation of something more certain for the region and its priorities and a certain funding source is seen as an advantage [BS-IP 1], however, there will be the disadvantage of the strong competition for project funding [ibid]. The above actors have supported a more modest approach of a combination of the two cooperation forms. They do not support a combination, but suggest a closer relation between them, the better policy alignment or the stronger consideration of the EUSBSR by the Programme. They are optimistic about the Strategy and can see a stronger interrelation for the future. What is regarded as a disadvantage is the luck of

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funding, expressed indirectly by the stakeholders. If there was a funding mechanism for the EUSBSR, then the Programme, which is actually the funding mechanism, might not be needed that much. Apart from these actors, there are others who support that the EUMRS and the INTERREG B Programme are "different sides of the same coin" [BS- IP 6 and 10]. These opinions will be presented here. The first stakeholder (BS-IP 6) mentions that there is already a change in the transnational cooperation to be observed, where the cooperation of the two forms is already to be seen. There will be better funding alignment and cooperation and contact among the actors and increased cooperation with the INTERREG Programme will be seen [ibid]. "In general I do not see any disadvantages in a possible combination", while it will be a benefit the better coordination and funding of projects (see EUSBSR) there where has been tradition of experience in projects (INTERREG) and this will result in a win win situation, combining experience in project implementation and better funding coordination [ibid]. The other stakeholder, BS-IP 10 underlines that we cannot assimilate the two cooperation forms, taking into account that the EUSBSR is broader and has topics that the INTERREG Programme has not, as crime issue for example. The advantage of the EUSBSR is that it drew more the attention of the actors through its political support [ibid]. The possibility of a combination may lie in having the INTERREG as an implementation instrument, so that contributions in other activities may be made, too [ibid]. For BS-IP 5 finds it impossible to combine the two cooperation forms, due to their core differences: It strongly underlined that the two forms are not the same thing; the Strategy is a "policy framework" and the Programme a "financial tool". What is seen as an advantage is the "fully overlapping of a Programme with a defined macro-region [ibid], what actually anyway exists. For the Baltic Sea, the EUSBSR is seen as new framework which may embrace all the needs of the region and highlight the cooperation bonds of yearlong co-existence. However, the INTERREG Programme has built a network and has a tradition which is difficult to set aside. There is a large number of people involved in the INTERREG as well, who might not be in favour with a combination of a new, yet experimental cooperation form, which gains more importance through its political support. Nevertheless, by the stakeholders, the EUSBSR is regarded as more important in general, since it embraces the region.

#### **4.3.2 Argumentation on a possible (or not) combination of the INTERREG B Programme and the EU macro-regional strategy in the Danube corridor**

Discussions on a possible combination of the INTERREG Programmes with the EU macro-regional strategy in the Danube area are not yet in plan, taking into account that the EUSBSR counts only almost two years of life. The actors in the Danube macro-regional strategy are still in an organisational phase, where results have to be produced so that the Strategy can show its visibility. Therefore, underlying the difference of the two forms, due to which a combination is not possible, a better alignment of the objectives of the INTERREG with the EUSBSR will be useful [D-IP

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5]. What is meant, is that the objectives of the EUBSR should be included in those of the funding programmes, so that this could result in more and better project funding. The coming change in the geographical coverage of the Programme, i.e. the creation of the new Danube Programme which will cover the area of the EU Danube macro-regional strategy is seen as an advantage for the region. Similar to the case of the Baltic Sea, the 'labelling' will define the region as such, as the Danube region, while at the same it will define some projects as well, which concern the whole region of Danube [D-IP 2]. For this and for the better funding allocation to the projects (to know where the money goes) is the 'labelling' considered important [D-IP 7]. This helps in shaping people's minds that the projects they are applying for, are for the Danube region. It is more a psychological procedure for the people living along the Danube, it would have been an advantage, though this is not the main point [D-IP 5]. On the contrary, for D-IP 2, naming a transnational territorial cooperation programme after the EU macro-regional strategy would have been the added value of a future possible combination. However, since this combination is not foreseen to happen, the point for the moment is to see what the INTERREG can do in relation to the EUSDSR, to set common priorities for both and tackle topics that address everyone in the region [ibid], to achieve in other words a better interrelation. On these factors may also depend a future possible combination, on thinking sufficiently together, as well as on the support of the European Commission, the actors' commitment and the labelling promotion [ibid]. On the visibility of the creation of a new and 'labelled' Programme was also asked D-IP 6. Regarding that the new Programme will cover a large transnational space, as was also the case with the previous and not that successful CADSES Programme, D-IP 6 underlines that we talk about two different cases which should not be mixed, since the same mistakes will not happen again. Considering a possible combination, what has been discussed by now there is only a division on the roles so far, since the political logic of the two cooperation forms is different; what is generally agreed, is the coordination of policies and projects, keeping the 3 NOs character as it is [ibid]. Where a possible combination may depend on, is the orientation of the priorities and the activities of INTERREG, then more intensive common projects may be launched and discussions on common challenges can be better initiated [D-IP 8]. According to D-IP 7, a possible combination of the two transnational cooperation forms could be an advantage for promoting the European integration, something that is mainly trying to be done politically through the EUMSR. The latter provide a suitable cooperation platform and their implementation is considered as very important [ibid]. To the advantages of a possible combination can be added the real transnational character that this combination will have and the automatism of bringing all this cooperation forms together, regarding that the EUMRS offer a suitable cooperation framework for countries especially for the newly accessing ones, as Croatia [D-IP 9]. As for any disadvantages, they will depend on the process that this combination will be done, so it is still too early to address any [ibid]. Taking into account the opinions of actors involved in the Transnational Territorial Cooperation Programmes, the opinions vary. On the one

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hand, the representative from the South East European Programme [D-IP 10] supports that a possible combination has both positive and negative characteristics. The merging of the two will be complex, despite the fact that it will be a more integrated approach, where one actor will address all the problems, but this is neither defined nor fully discussed yet [ibid]. However, the interrelation of the two cooperation forms should not result in a combination but in "something newly rearranged" [ibid]. The way that this will happen i.e. the clearly addressed needs and the mechanisms for funding, as well as the political support on an national and regional/local level is the challenge for it, while the risk lies in the "over-ambitions" and the "over-complex" structure, on which we had experience in the past. On the other hand, representatives of the Central Europe Transnational Territorial Programme highlight that there cannot be a combination of the two cooperation forms in the future, since they are two different things. Moreover, they have clear defining borders considering the funding allocation and the participation in the projects [ibid]. Here it has to be noted that the EUMRS is not a funding mechanism and it does not have a funding source itself; through this it can only coordinate the available funding and work in parallel with the INTERREG, supporting its actions [ibid]., What can be done, however, is that the Programme may give assistance to the preparation of the projects. Lastly, it is underlined that by having a combination of the two forms, the whole idea of the EUDSR will be lost: The three NOs will be broken, since funding and institutions will be provided and the regions will be specifically defined [ibid]. Therefore such a combination seems meaningless to be achieved. The case of the Danube macro-regional strategy does not appear much different than the Baltic Sea one. Actors do not support a combination as such, but instead a closer interrelation of the two forms, and an objectives' alignment, so that the funding of the projects will be better allocated. This is also a problem arising from the lack of labelling between the Programmes and the Strategies which makes the allocation of money more difficult. What the actors in the regions support more is the better co-working with the Programmes.

So far, the opinions of the stakeholders in both regions on the topic of a possible combination of the two cooperation forms have been discussed. All these opinions, together with their views on the future of the EUMRS formulate an argumentation on whether or not a combination might be possible. In this case we cannot clearly distinguish the two regions since the arguments of the actors are applicable to both. Certainly, the characteristics of the two regions are different. On the one hand, the Baltic Sea region has a strong cooperation tradition and long lasting institutions [D-IP 3/4], while on the other, the Danube region tries to identify itself between the Central and Eastern Europe, by forming gradually cooperation structures as well. It is true that any speculation for the future cannot be made, neither the opinions of the actors may act as foreseeing it. What they be helpful, though, is see their view on this emerging phenomenon and how it can be related to the existing cooperation form of the European Union. As it was already mentioned in the

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theoretical part of this research, the transnational cooperation forms are both characterised by similarities and differences, while considering their future, some of these similarities and differences may play a role. Together with the stakeholders' view on whether a future combination of the two cooperation forms, a picture can be built on the arguments supporting it or not.

A first argument that may support a combination of the Transnational Territorial Cooperation Programmes is their geographical flexible space. The fact that the borders of the EUMRS are built upon interests is the "absolute advantage of the EUMRS in relation to the INTERREG" transnational programme [D-IP 5]. This gradual change is considered as an advantage from European Parliament members [EU-IP 3,4] as well, who support the idea of building cooperation among interests instead of defining a region on economic criteria. A contrast argument is that due to these fuzzy boundaries, the funding allocation is more difficult to be done. This is the case mainly in the Danube macro-regional strategy, where the people involved in the project level, cannot easily identify the region to address their project proposals. To this, the 'labelling' of the Programme to the region is considered as an advantage by the majority of actors, without constituting however the major point. It will certainly assist in shaping the people's mind, both culturally (that they belong in the Danube region and build a Danube identity) as well as economically, in order to apply for projects for their specific region. At this point, is where the Danube macro-regional strategy lacks in a way in comparison to the Baltic Sea- the identification. As said, the Baltic Sea does not face this problem, since the Strategy is named after the existing Programme, in a normal procedure, due to the geographic position of the region [BS-IP 1]. Since it is a matter of state, the actors of the Baltic Sea macro-regional strategy do not consider this 'labelling' as such important, they nevertheless recognise it comparative advantage. Besides, some stakeholders in the Baltic Sea macro-regional strategy have mentioned that local challenges may be tackled by the INTERREG B Programme, though broader topics through the EUBSR (BS- IP 2, 3).

A next argument in favour of a combination could be the innovative idea on which the EUMRS are built. They offer a more strategic and holistic framework for transnational cooperation, they are dealing with "projects coherent with the Action Plan" [D-IP 3/4], necessary for their visibility and networking [ibid], and applicable to the general EU idea for more strategic and visible approaches (for this, see Europe 2020 Strategy, EU-IP 1 above). It is a new cooperation platform where several challenges are addressed on a common base and cover a vast area of topics. All this effort is being done by better coordinating the available funding and institutions [BS-IP 1]. They are seen by the actors as policy implementing instruments. As BS-IP 8 characteristic mentions: "The macro-regional strategy for the Baltic Sea is the reflection of Europe 2020 in the Baltic Sea region". On the other hand, the INTERREG Programmes are focused on specific objectives set for each funding period and according to the actors are financial instruments. This is something that

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differentiates them to the macro-regional strategies, according to the stakeholders, since the latter do not have their own funding mechanism. Nevertheless, this should stay as such, so that they will not lose their unique character and the actors will stay committed. By actors it is not only meant the operational level representatives, who still remain enthusiastic about the Strategies [BS-IP 6, D-IP 2], but also the higher political level. Its support is vital for the visibility and continuance of the strategies, according to the opinions of the actors stresses in this chapter. This can be both an advantage and a disadvantage considering a possible combination of the two cooperation forms.

### 4.3.3 General Comments

From the above, one could assume that the EUMRS and the INTERREG B Programmes in these regions, may be combined, since the Strategies would offer the strategic approach and the focus on broad topics and better coordination [BS-IP 1], having the political support to easier implement and promote projects and the Programmes the institutional capacity and financial support. The EUSDSR may raise the visibility of the projects in the region in the future, while the Programme can strategically be thought together with the MRS [D-IP 2]. However, this is not as easy as it may sound. If the political support decreases in time or even disappears, then the EUMRS will lose their actual power, and this will lead to an unsuccessful combination risking the visibility of the Programmes as well. In addition, the EUMRS have also been created to coordinate several funding mechanisms, Moreover, time is needed to bring results for the EUMRS, which are relatively new in the transnational cooperation field. Without visible results, no further step can be taken, since the strategies have to prove themselves that they have a *raison d' être*. Therefore, although the majority of policies tackled by the INTERREG may be also addressed by the EUMRS [D-IP 2, BS-IP 3] it is better that they stay separated, at least for the coming funding period. What is proposed to be done though is a better alignment of the objectives of the two cooperation forms. The majority of the interview partners supported a stronger interrelation of the two cooperation forms in the future and stressed the need for the policies' alignment, so that the funding allocation can be easier.

What should not be underestimated is the long history of the INTERREG B Programmes. Throughout the years they have acted as EU policy promoters and funding instruments and therefore a strong network, lobby and people's relations have been built, which is difficult to change. People engaged in the transnational territorial cooperation programmes for years would not easily support a change in their 'status quo'. As a result they end up in supporting the EUMRS in the topics they can (since the Programmes do not address so many topics D-IP 3/4), offering funding to the projects accepted. Here is reflected a weakness of the EUMRS: The lack of own

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institutional and funding mechanisms. Although the 3 NOs concept has been seen as an advantage and a low risk for the political support ["politicians have nothing to lose" BS-EU 4] it cannot juxtapose a strong institutional alternative that may overcome or be combined with the one from the INTERREG. On the other hand, the lack of a funding mechanism results in the same problem. The actors, as mentioned before, do want to keep the 3NOs in the Strategies and do not wish to change them into a funding instrument. This will also keep the balance in the actors' roles in the two regions, until the one fully accepts the other [BS-IP 6 mentions that "they-the Programmes- are ready to accept us, there is institutional capacity"].

Keeping in mind the above arguments, it can be realised that a combination of the two cooperation forms is a difficult task, mainly because the basic specifications are missing. Instead of a combination as such, the majority both of the decision making and the operational level have proposed a better cooperation between transnational territorial cooperation programmes and the EU macro-regional strategies, a stronger interrelation and a better objectives' alignment. The EUMRS should be taken into account in the next funding period and should be included in the objectives of the INTERREG B Programmes, according to the actors. Since the EUMRS offer a strategic framework for transnational cooperation which is aligned to the EU current perspectives and the Programmes have the tradition and means for this cooperation, a better connection between the two can be achieved. It is not but the time, the commitment of the actors and the EU proposals that will show the visibility, the abilities and future opportunities of the EU macro-regional strategies and their relation to the INTERREG transnational territorial cooperation programmes.

## 5. Conclusions

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**M**acro-regional strategies have evolved as a hot topic in the field of the transnational cooperation across the European Union. This raised momentum in more and more countries which share common denominators and challenges, to be part of a new macro-regional strategy. Current discussions are raised on the creation of a macro-regional strategy in the Adriatic and the Mediterranean Sea, while there are two already prepared for the Baltic Sea and the Danube corridor. At the same time, the European Transnational Territorial Cooperation Programmes (INTERREG B) continue playing an active role in the transnational cooperation arena. But do the EU macro-regional strategies bring something new for the transnational cooperation? This research has dealt with the added value of the two EU macro-regional Strategies, in relation to the existing transnational territorial cooperation programmes, while arguments on a possible or not combination of the two cooperation forms were set.

The master thesis did aim at suggesting a suitable cooperation platform for the future, but to present and analyse the views of the actors who are involved in the transnational cooperation in these two regions, as expressed now. This chapter is the concluding chapter of this research. Here, a brief summary of the main findings will be presented and some key conclusions will be made. Moreover, a critical reflection of the research will follow, depicting the theoretical and methodological approaches. In addition, some recommendation for praxis will be pointed out, while lastly, areas for further research and some final remarks will conclude this chapter.

### 5.1 Summary of the main findings

The Baltic Sea and the Danube corridor are, as has been made clear throughout the master thesis, two divergent and different regions. Both marked by the West- East division during the Cold War, the nation states started developing cooperation structures in the form of sub-regional agreements soon after its end (Nordic countries had started even earlier) in order to improve their relations with their neighbours and achieve in the long-term an EU accession, which was developing at the same time. Hence, by the end of the Cold War, the first cooperation funding programmes across large geographic areas had been launched under the Cohesion Policy, so that a balanced territory would be achieved. These INTERREG B Programmes managed to change the scene in the cooperation among the member and non member states and to develop new networks and experiences. In the last years, a new transnational cooperation form emerged, which was a bottom-up procedure, and focused on the common solving of problems and challenges of countries sharing common denominators, such as the Baltic Sea and the Danube river. All these cooperation instruments exist nowadays in parallel. In order to answer the main research question of the research, it was useful to set four sub-questions which were

answered throughout the thesis (see introduction, pg.13-14). In the beginning was answered the first research sub-question, where the evolution of the transnational cooperation in Europe was presented together with the two regions at hand, so that its concept could be conceptualised and set the scene for the research (*Chapter 1*). Furthermore, the similarities and differences of these cooperation forms were summed up in the third chapter, through the desk study and the theoretical approaches set out in this chapter. At this point not every similarity or difference was distinguished, though there was a division of three main categories: their governance structure, the geographic area they cover and the reasons why they wish to cooperate.

Concerning their governance structure, both the INTERREG B Programmes and the EUMRS are operating under the so-called multi-level governance, where the involvement of actors from different governmental levels is necessary and decisions are taken in the lowest possible levels. The INTERREG Programmes have managed to bring the local authorities in the forefront and take an active role. However, for the EUMRS, there is also the high political level and the EC that play an important role in the decision making, promotion and implementation of the Strategies (*see table 1.2 pg.22*), while the regional and local authorities are focused on the operational level. As far as the sub-regional cooperation, then despite the involvement of local actors, the decision making bodies are the governments. Here we can observe that the EU macro-regional strategies share characteristics of both other existing cooperation forms, combining the multi-level character with the nationally driven decision making. It true that a lot is based on the political support of the EUMRS and this makes them partly a political instrument, regarding that it was a bottom-up approach, presented first during the Swedish EU Presidency. Taking their geographical area into account, the INTERREG B Programmes cover large transnational areas, which are divided by regions, according to the NUTS category they belong, i.e. according to GDP criteria. This categorisation serves for the funding allocation for the projects. Their difference with the EUMRS is that the latter are based on more flexible boundaries, the cooperation is based upon interests and not economic criteria. Common challenges that require common actions are defined and a macro-region is formed by regions who face these challenges. On the other hand, the sub-regional cooperation is being undertaken by the nations states and therefore its borders are clearly defined. As for the reasons for cooperation, the nation states under their sub-regional agreements did cooperate for an accession in the EU and for showing that after the Cold War there could be good relations developed in this part of Europe. For the INTERREG B Programmes it was an EU Initiative, through which was operationalised the Cohesion Policy as well, and with the principles of subsidiarity and proportionality gained even more importance. The reasons for the cooperation under the EUMRS was apart from the common challenges, the need for a better coordination of the existing funding mechanisms (*research sub-question 2*).

All these help in setting the framework for the further research. The aim of the thesis was to identify the added value of the EUMRS in relation to the INTERREG B

Programmes and set arguments for or against a possible combination. Focusing on the discussions of Colomb (2007), Bachtler & Taylor (2003), Mairate (2006) and the EP study on the added value of Structural funds (2009) on the definitions of added value and on the added value of the transnational cooperation, Structural Funds and Cohesion Policy, the added value of the EUMRS is presented in the 4.1 chapter. Considering this, the main added value of the EUMRS is indeed the cooperation as such, the fact of bringing together actors from different countries and levels. Moreover, the involvement of the EC and even more of the high political levels bring an added value to the Strategies. It is the first time in the EU context where political authorities take such an active role in the transnational cooperation, setting the priorities and promoting the Strategies. The fact that the Strategies bring a more strategic approach on the cooperation and dealing with broader issues, covering several topics that were not covered before by the INTERREG B (e.g. crime) is considered as an added value. Learning practices transfer has also been seen positively. Hence, that they managed to make people think bigger/ broader and cultivate an identity across their region, as for instance in the Danube region, and to bring historical regional organisations to work together, as for example VASAB and HELCOM. The latter constitute a major finding, since they reflect the value of cooperation: to bring people together and shape people's minds in creating common identities. Moreover, the better relationship of the Baltic Sea states with Russia through the EUBSR, is also considered an advantage. In order to present arguments for and against a possible combination in the future, it was useful to see the opinions of the actors on where this future will depend on. The majority underlined the need for the political support, since it is necessary for the visibility of the Strategy as well as the "branding" of the projects, as an interview partner mentioned [BS-IP 2]. The political support is indeed the driving force for the Strategies. Another factor of the future of the EUMRS is the general commitment of the actors and their willingness to continue cooperating. Moreover, the results that the projects under the EUMRS will bring, will also influence their future, while discussions around the 'labelling' of the INTERREG B Programme in the Danube region with the EUDSR were also stressed as important for the future. A major finding here is the fact that in the future such an overlapping, labelled Programme will be prepared: The Danube Programme. This aims at a better allocation of the funding for projects of the region and for a better region identification (research *sub-question 3*). With all these in mind, and with the opinions of the actors, we concluded in the end of the previous chapter that a combination of the two cooperation forms might not be that easy or possible to be done in the near future. The arguments supporting a combination, where based mainly on the broader cooperation and more strategic character of the EUMRS, on a real transnational character of cooperation, that many priorities will be now addressed and first and foremost the fact that transnational cooperation will be built upon the interests of the member states. On the other hand, the lack of individual funding and institutional mechanisms are a barrier (despite seen as an advantage) for the EUMRS. For this they 'depend' on the INTERREG or other instruments in order to apply their goals. Although the stakeholders did not see any disadvantages in a possible

combination, what they made clear from the beginning is that the two cooperation forms are different: The Strategies are policy promoters, while the INTERREG financial instruments. This, however, would be better seen through the way that this possible combination might happen and how it will be addressed. At this point it can be noted that some actors were not in favour of a possible combination, such as actors coming from the INTERREG Programmes. It is true that throughout all these years of cooperation, strict bonds are built and networks are cultivated and it is difficult to disentangle these stable characteristics. What has been proposed by the majority, though, is a stronger cooperation of the two cooperation forms in the future and a better alignment of their objectives. This is indeed a step further in the transnational cooperation in the two areas and in the Cohesion Policy lines of the coming funding period.

## 5.2 Critical reflections

As already mentioned, for this master thesis were used approaches such as the functional geography, the multi-level governance and the added value (see figure 2.3). Regarding the functional boundaries it is true that the new cooperation form of the macro-regional strategies is built in what Blatter (2003) calls a "Europe with the regions" (instead of "Europe of the regions, which excluded the nations), i.e. where "governance no longer excludes governmental actors but points to a strengthened collaboration among various levels of the politico-administrative system based on exchange and negotiation among equals" (pg.531). Moreover, according to CPMR (2012): "the boundaries of the macro-regions are defined more in terms of problems and opportunities, and by type of geographical features contained with it (river, lake, mountain, sea etc) than by their area in strictly geographical terms or by number of members; macro-regions are flexible, corresponding to "functional" geographical limits based on shared problems" (pg.3). These have been observed when doing the research and indeed were recognised by the stakeholders as a main advantage as well. The added value seen in 2.4 as "value resulting from the Community assistance that is additional to that which would have been secured by national and regional authorities and the private sector" (Colomb, 2007, pg.347) and "as a positive effect of Cohesion Policy management and implementation of member states' own policies for regional/economic development", either through the EU Cohesion Policy influence or the member states' changes in the way of managing domestic policies (EP Study, pg. 70) were to be seen in the research too. While added value categories according to Bachtler & Taylor(2003), as "improving the governance process of regional development", "making the EU more visible to its stakeholders" and "cooperation and knowledge and exchange related benefits"(pg. 70) were among those of the EUMRS. To these were certainly added the strategic approach of the cooperation (under the EUMRS) as well as the strong actors and politicians' commitment. The concept of multi-level governance as explained in Chapter 2 was also to be seen during the research, as well as the principles of subsidiarity and proportionality. These were to

be identified throughout the whole governance structure of the cooperation forms and especially while choosing the appropriate methodology. The latter was decided according to the research questions. A thorough desk study was necessary for conceptualising some notions, on which the empirical data was analysed. It helped in shaping a clear picture of the topic and regions at hand. In addition, choosing actors from both the decision making and operational level helped in having a clearer framework. Considering the latter, it would have been more useful to have more actors from the decision making level than the number achieved. However, this was not an easy task either due to busy agendas or due to referral to other stakeholders.

### **5.3 Recommendations for further praxis and research**

This research tried to shed light on the added value of the EUMRS and on arguments on their possible combination with the INTERREG B Programmes, contributing to theories related to this. Certainly, in the framework of a master thesis not all aspects of a topic may be addressed. This leaves, therefore, the space for further praxis, considering the findings, and further research, concluding what has not yet been done. As for the practical part, the findings of this research might seem useful for the stakeholders of the EUMRS and the INTERREG B Programmes. On the one hand, stakeholders from the decision making level may see and investigate further the added value of the EUMRS as well as its weak points and take decisions according to them, since their support is vital for the added value. Moreover, the operational level can see where the added value lies and support further similar actions, or lobbying their strengths. Considering the arguments of a combination, actors can see where the future of the MRS may depend on, according to their views and the decision making level may work for making the EUMRS stronger. Additionally, it can be observed whether there are any advantages in a combination and what is proposed, so that a better use of them for a better cooperation of the two forms can be achieved. Maybe this could result in another change in the transnational cooperation. The topic of the macro-regional strategies is indeed a very interesting topic, since it involves a variety of actors, has special governance structures and geographical characteristics. Regarding that is an upcoming issue, the literature is still not so broad and there is still a lot to be researched. Further research may be done in the field of functional geography and functional spaces and whether the EU macro-regional strategies may continue existing as such. Moreover, their further relationship with the Transnational Territorial Cooperation Programmes in terms of approaches on their governance structure could also be investigated further. Specific aspects of added value may also constitute a research topic, such as any policy learning occurred, or the visibility of the added value of the political support. Another idea would be to look further in the possibilities of a creation of new macro-regional strategies and how these could operate, their added value, any similarities and differences with the currently existing ones and where do they lie. Nevertheless, all these require time and engagement in the topic.

#### 5.4 Final remarks

In a day by day changing environment in the European Union, the transnational cooperation could have not stayed the same. Under the impact of the European crisis, the Transnational Territorial Cooperation Programmes demand stricter rules, better visibility and better use of funding. Here is where the EU macro-regional strategies have come to play a role, trying to coordinate the available funding and institutional mechanisms. Only by being a *strategy* implies according to Albrechts (2001), that it is used for complex problems where authorities at different levels and different sectors and private actors are mutually dependent" (pg.295), as indeed proved by the research as an added value. Moreover, being an *EU* strategy shows the close relation they have with the European Union, while the general *flagship* project idea, i.e. more tailor made projects, which also proposed in the Europe 2020 strategy, reflects the last tendency in the EU. However, the EU macro-regional strategies did manage to bring something new in the scene of the transnational cooperation in Europe. No matter the changes that are inevitable to occur, the instruments for transnational cooperation should never abstain the reason they were created for and which should continue being the moto of their future development. Reflecting back to the very first quote of this thesis, Jacques Delors, couldn't have express this better:

*"Man's endeavour and political aspiration is to try to develop a balanced territory"*

Jacques Delors, President of the European Commission (1985-1995)

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- <http://www.balticsea-region-strategy.eu/pages/priorities>
- <http://www.danube-region.eu/>

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## Appendix I

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An example of the questionnaire is provided. Please note that according to the discussion and interview partner the interview questions were adapting. The questions are divided in three main categories, as follows:

### **"Achievements"**

1. What would you regard as the greatest achievement of the macro-regional strategies so far?
2. Are there specific policies or actions that you could mention, which have been better achieved by the cooperation platform of the macro-regional strategies?
3. What is the added value of the macro-regional strategies?
4. How would you evaluate the achievements of the transnational territorial cooperation programmes in the current funding period? (*for the region, I ask specific*)
5. How do you see the programme developing / evolving in the future European Cohesion Policy?
6. What did the macro-regional strategy in your area achieve that the INTERREG programme did not manage to achieve in the current funding period? Are there any advantages to be seen in comparison to the territorial cooperation programme?
7. What has been the main argument in favour of macro-regional strategies that stimulated the great support and engagement of the European Parliament and Commission?
8. Do we expect too much from the EUMRS? Did they start in a wrong time (end of funding period?)

### **"In relation to the future Cohesion Policy"**

9. After the examination of the reports as well as the future cohesion policy goals, it becomes clear that the need for greater involvement of the macro-regional strategies is emphasised. What is the proposed role for the macro-regional strategies in the future Cohesion Policy? And what role is foreseen for the (transnational) territorial cooperation programme(s)?
10. Can (or does), in your view the progress on macro-regional strategies influence the next programming period? Could they influence the future role of the transnational cooperation programmes?

11. Taking into account the future Cohesion Policy objectives, which of the priorities of the macro-regional strategies could be addressed by the transnational programmes, and vice versa?
12. How far could the macro-regional strategies align to the Cohesion Policy goals (growth, EU 2020) by keeping their territorial cooperation characteristics?
13. Will the macro-regional strategies play a more active role for the future EU Cohesion Policy, in relation to the INTERREG transnational cooperation programmes, especially by tackling geographically common issues (eg. environment)?
14. There has been great political support for the macro-regional strategies. From your experience, who were the main supporters, and what were their main arguments or reasons for supporting this approach? Which actors were perhaps a bit more hesitant, and for which reasons
15. What is the reason for such an augmenting political support for the evolution of the macro-regional and why is this not the same case for the territorial cooperation programme? Could this testify their future role?
16. Where do you think their future depends on?

### **"Combination"**

17. In what respect would you expect an added value in combining macro-regional strategies and transnational INTERREG programmes in future from a i) geographical, ii) political, iii) institutional perspective? What would the barriers be?
18. Where would you see any disadvantages in such combination?
19. If not, what would you propose to be done (maybe new institutions, more funding?)
20. Does the EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region/ Danube Region provide a suitable framework in the future for the territorial cooperation programmes? Could they be a useful tool for the Cohesion Policy and benefit the regions?
21. In your opinion, do you think that in the future we could talk about a new form of transnational cooperation, formulated by a combination of these two transnational cooperation forms?
22. On what will a possible combination of the two cooperation forms depend?
23. Could the macro-regional strategies' flexible boundaries (based on interests and not GDP) operate as an added value for the future EU transnational cooperation?

## Appendix II: Interview Guide

Coding of interview partners. The list with the region, date, coding and professional position of the interview partners is listed below (Note: D- IP stands for Danube-Interview Partner, BS-IP for Baltic Sea- Interview Partner and EU-IP European Union-Interview Partner).

### I. The Danube Region

Date	Coding name	Professional Position
25/09/2012	D-IP 1	Project Manager at INTERACT Point. Focus on Financial and Knowledge Management
15/10/2012	D-IP 2	Expert at METIS, Vienna
18/10/2012	D-IP 3 & D-IP 4	High position in JTS Central Europe & high position Communication Unit
24/10/2012	D-IP 5	High position in Urban Planning (City of Vienna), -Executive Group for Construction & Technology, Urban Planning Group- PAC 10
25/10/2012	D-IP 6	High position in the Federal Chancellery Austria
25/10/2012	D-IP 7	Team Leader Development Infrastructure at Via Donau- PAC 1a
29/10/2012	D-IP 8	High position at Slovak Academy of Sciences- PAC 7
30/10/2012	D-IP 9	Deputy Managing Director at "VITUKI" Environmental Protection and Water Management Research Institute (NGO)- PAC 5
14/11/2012	D-IP 10	Project Manager at the JTS South East Europe

### II. The Baltic Sea Region

Date	Coding name	Professional Position
15/11/2012	BS- IP 1	High position at VASAB
15/11/2012	BS- IP 2	International Coordinator at Regio Blekinge
22/11/2012	BS- IP 3	High position in Division for Regional Growth, Ministry of Enterprise, Energy and Communications
22/11/2012	BS- IP 4	Programme Manager at Swedish Agency for Economic and Regional Growth (Tillväxtverket)
26/11/2012	BS- IP 5	High position of the Managing Authority at the JTS Rostock/ Riga
27/11/2012	BS- IP 6	Chief Adviser, Danish Maritime Authority (agency of the Ministry of Business and Growth)- PAC 4
27/11/2012	BS- IP 7	Chief Inspectorate of Environmental Protection, Baltic Sea Focal Point (Poland) -PAC1
28/11/2012	BS- IP 8	Project Manager at INTERACT, For the support of the implementation of the EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region
28/11/2012	BS- IP 9	Executive Advisor in International Affairs, BOVERKET (Swedish National Board of Housing, Building and Planning)
21/12/2012	BS- IP 10	Expert at BBSR, Division I 3 - European Spatial and Urban Development
21/12/2012	BS- IP 11	High position at Ministry of Employment and Economy, Helsinki
30/01/2012	BS- IP 12	Policy Analysis, Foresight, Change Management at INTERACT Programme

### III. European Union

Date	Coding name	Professional Position
03/12/2012	EU- IP 1	EC DG Regional Policy, Department European transnational and inter-regional cooperation, Brussels
04/12/2012	EU- IP 2	PhD European-Commission, DG Regional Policy, Territorial Cooperation
04/12/2012	EU- IP 3	MEP, Chair of the Committee on Budgetary Control, Vice Chair of the Danube Forum MEP
04/12/2012	EU- IP 4	MEP, Member of the European Parliament's Committee on Regional Development
10/12/2012	EU- IP 5	EC DG Regional Policy, Project Manager EU policies