

## Origins of the strategy

The preparatory work for Alpine Strategy had started long before the invitation by the Council to the Commission to prepare a Macro-regional Strategy for the Alpine Region; the Strategy builds upon a long tradition of co-operation in the Alps and on the existing preparatory work, namely:

- The resolution adopted by the Heads of Government of Arge Alp in June 2011
- The Bad Ragaz Decision<sup>1</sup> and the Initiative Paper of the Conference of Alpine Regions of 29 June 2012 followed by the political meeting held in Innsbruck in October 2012,
- The European Parliament resolution of 23 May 2013 on a macro-regional strategy for the Alps;
- The Grenoble 'Political resolution towards a European Union Strategy for the Alpine Region' of 18 October 2013;
- The political resolution presented in an event held in Brussels, on 28 November 2013;

The strategy will benefit from the long experience of a large number of cooperation structures already operating in the area: Arge-Alp, Alpine Convention, Alpe-Adria, Euregio, Cotrao, trilateral cooperation between Slovenia, NE-Italy and Austria and other ad hoc structures such as the 'Zurich Group';

## Overview of the preparatory phase of the strategy

The European Council of 19-20 December 2013 <sup>2</sup>invited the Commission, in cooperation with Member States, to elaborate an EU Strategy for the Alpine Region by June 2015, recalling its conclusions of June 2011<sup>3</sup> and the Council Conclusions on the added value of macro-regional strategies of October 2013<sup>4</sup>.

Building on

- the lessons learnt and experience from the other previous three macro-regional strategies: EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region, EU Strategy for the Danube Region and EU Strategy for the Adriatic and Ionian Region),
- the work of a **Steering Committee** composed of representatives from States and Regions as well as observers from the Alpine Space Programme and the Alpine Convention put in place on November 2013;
- The outcome of the extensive **public online consultation** (July-October 2014);

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<sup>1</sup>Bad Ragaz, 29. Juni 2012

<sup>2</sup>Council decision.

<sup>3</sup>Council decision

<sup>4</sup>Council conclusions

- The debate in the **Stakeholder Conference** on EUSALP and the Milan Declaration of the Alpine States and Regions (Milan, 1-2 December 2014);
- The Opinions adopted by the **Committee of the Regions** and by the **European Economic and Social Committee** on EUSALP in December 2014;
- Further input from **experts** <sup>5</sup>

The Commission has prepared a Communication <sup>6</sup> and an Action Plan<sup>7</sup> on the EU Strategy for the Alpine Region (EUSALP), which has been adopted by the **College of the Commission on 28 July 2015**<sup>8</sup>. On **27 November 2015** the Strategy was endorsed by **Council of the European Union** <sup>9</sup> and on **28 June 2016 by the EU Council**<sup>10</sup>.

Other EU Institutions, in particular the **Committee of the Regions**, and its Alpine interregional group, and the **European Economic and Social Committee**, made proposals of substance through their opinions and debates.

On the 10th of February 2014, and after a meeting held by Commissioner Hahn with Foreign Affairs Ministers of Alpine States, a "Steering Committee" was constituted with representatives of all States and some regions participating in the Strategy in order to support the Commission in the process of preparation of the Strategy.

An important step in the preparation of the strategy was the **Stakeholder Consultation**

A broad stakeholder consultation was conducted by the EU and some of the participating countries in the period from 15 July - 15 October 2014. It aimed at reaching out to the relevant stakeholders as national, regional and local authorities, inter-governmental and non-governmental bodies, international financial institutions and the private sector, as well as individual citizens and at gathering their ideas regarding the proposed themes in order to make sure that the Strategy was realistic in its purpose, appropriate in its objectives, and responded to genuine needs of the Region's inhabitants.

The EUSALP Discussion Paper (also called "core document")<sup>11</sup> was the basis for this public consultation. The on-line public consultation was structured around a set of open questions

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<sup>5</sup>Reports of Kai Bohme, Agnes Kelemen and Philippe Claeys

<sup>6</sup>Communication

<sup>7</sup>Action Plan

<sup>8</sup>Council conclusions

<sup>9</sup>Council Conclusions

<sup>10</sup>Council Conclusions

<sup>11</sup>This document, containing already a first outline of the content of the three thematic Objectives of EUSALP, was prepared by the European Commission on the basis of the inputs received from the participating countries and was discussed and agreed during the meeting with the National Contact Points, held in Chambéry, on 13 June 2014.

regarding the Strategy in the four Alpine languages (French, German, Italian and Slovenian) as well as in English.<sup>12</sup>.

Respondents of different capacities participated in the public consultation of the EUSALP. In particular private persons and representatives from the civil society responded to the survey, followed by public authorities. In total 330 contributions were received of which 198 on the website of the Commission and 129 on the Italian page of the EUSALP-website. the latter as follows: 54 in English, 64 in German, 23 in French, 51 in Italian, and eight in Slovenian. Residents of different countries participated in the consultation, including both residents of the countries in the Alpine Region, as well as other EU member states. All in all, 26 contributions came from Austria, five from Belgium, 38 from France, 44 from Germany, 194 from Italy, one from Latvia, four from Liechtenstein, one from the Netherlands, ten from Slovenia and eight from Switzerland.

Commission produced a summary report on the public consultation on the European Union Strategy for the Alpine Region<sup>13</sup>;

**Question:** we have all the contributions received. Shall we publish them as well on the EUSALP website? (They were made public in DG REGIO website after the consultation)

A large high-level stakeholder conference took place in Milan on 1-2 December 2014. The event, jointly organised by the Italian Presidency of the Council, the Lombardy Region and the Commission, gathered together some 1,000 participants from the seven participating countries. This conference **closed the public consultation** and was at the same time **the starting point for the drafting of the Action Plan**.

## Objectives

The general objective of the Strategy is to promote sustainable economic and social prosperity of the Alpine Region through growth and job creation, by improving its attractiveness, competitiveness and connectivity, while at the same time preserving the environment and ensuring healthy and balanced ecosystems.

The Strategy also aims to provide a coordinated response to issues better handled by acting together than separately. This Strategy, therefore, will seek to unlock the potential of the Alpine Region, by encouraging participants to overcome barriers to thinking more strategically and imaginatively about the opportunities available.

The Strategy brings a new impetus for cooperation and investment to the benefit of all involved actors: States, regions, civil society, stakeholders and, above all, European citizens and will seek to complement, rather than duplicate existing co-operation structures.

**Geography<sup>14</sup>:** The EUSALP covers **seven countries**:

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<sup>12</sup>Questionnaire of the public consultation

<sup>13</sup>Commission summary report on the public consultation

<sup>14</sup>Map of macro-region

- Five EU Member States: Austria, France, Germany, Italy and Slovenia
- Two non EU Member States: Liechtenstein and Switzerland

Of which **48 Regions** are involved in the process:

Austria (Burgenland, Kärnten, Niederösterreich, Oberösterreich, Salzburg, Steiermark, Tirol, Vorarlberg, Wien), France (Auvergne-Rhône-Alpes, Bourgogne-Franche-Comté, Provence-Alpes-Côte d'Azur), Germany (Baden-Württemberg, Bayern), Italy (Friuli Venezia Giulia, Liguria, Lombardia, Piemonte, Provincia Autonoma di Bolzano, Provincia Autonoma di Trento, Valle d'Aosta, Veneto), Switzerland (Aargau, Appenzell Ausserrhoden, Appenzell Innerrhoden, Basel-Landschaft, Basel-Stadt, Bern, Freiburg, Genf, Glarus, Graubünden, Jura, Luzern, Neuenburg, Nidwalden, Obwalden, Schaffhausen, Schwyz, Solothurn, St. Gallen, Tessin, Thurgau, Uri, Waadt, Wallis, Zug, Zürich).

## **EUSALP Priorities**

To achieve the general objectives of the strategy, three interdependent **thematic objectives** have been identified that focus on providing:

1. Fair access to job opportunities, building on the high competitiveness of the Region;
2. Sustainable internal and external accessibility;
3. A more inclusive environmental framework and renewable and reliable energy solutions for the future.

And a **cross-cutting objective**, building:

4. A sound macro-regional governance model for the Region to improve cooperation and the coordination of action.

Within each objective, a number of actions have been identified. These support EU policy objectives, including those with a territorial dimension.

The objectives and actions for each policy area are set out below.

### **Objective 1: Fair access to job opportunities, building on the high competitiveness of the Region**

**Action 1:** To develop an effective research and innovation ecosystem

Action Group Leader: Lombardy

**Action 2:** To increase the economic potential of strategic sectors

Action Group Leader: Auvergne-Rhône-Alpes and Baden-Württemberg

**Action 3:** To improve the adequacy of labour market, education and training in these strategic sectors

Action Group Leader: Trento

### **Objective 2: Sustainable internal and external accessibility to all**

**Action 4:** To promote inter-modality and interoperability in freight and passengers transport

Action Group Leader: EGTC European Region Tyrol – South Tyrol – Trentino

**Action 5:** To connect people electronically and promote accessibility to public services

Action Group Leader: Valle d'Aosta and Groupement suisse pour les régions de montagne (SAB)

### **Objective 3: A more inclusive environmental framework for all and renewable and reliable energy solutions for the future**

**Action 6:** To preserve and valorise natural resources, including water and cultural resources  
Action Group Leader: Carinthia and Alpine Convention

**Action 7:** To develop ecological connectivity in the EUSALP territory

Action Group Leader: Bavaria and Slovenia

**Action 8:** To improve risk management and to better manage climate change including major natural risks prevention;

Action Group Leader: Austria and Bavaria

**Action 9:** To make the territory a model region for energy efficiency and renewable energy

Action Group Leader: South-Tyrol

### **Governance**

The basis of the Strategy's governance system is laid down in the Milan Declaration of the Alpine States and Regions<sup>15</sup>, in accordance with the Grenoble Political Resolution<sup>16</sup>, the Commission's report on governance of macro-regional strategies<sup>17</sup> and the Council Conclusions of 21 October 2014.

Like the other three strategies, the EUSALP has three inter-related levels:

- A General Assembly/political level,
- An Executive Board/coordination level, and
- Nine Action Groups/implementation level.

### **The General Assembly**

The General Assembly is composed of

- Representatives from the participating States (according to each internal governance system),
- Representatives from all the Regions included in the Strategy,
- The EU Commission (as coordinator/facilitator), and
- The Alpine Convention (as observer);

MEPS (members of the European Parliament) might participate upon invitation.

The General Assembly is mainly responsible for laying down the general political guidelines for the Strategy. It furthermore has the possibility of organising ministerial meetings in order to create the necessary political awareness for the Strategy.

### **The Executive Board**

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<sup>15</sup>Milano's declaration

<sup>16</sup>Grenoble Declaration

<sup>17</sup>Commission Governance Report

The Executive Board is composed of

- Seven national delegations headed by the National Coordinators,
- The European Commission as an independent facilitator and coordinator, and
- The Alpine Convention and the Interreg Alpine Space Programme as advisors.

The Executive Board is in charge of the overall horizontal and vertical coordination of the EUSALP Action Plan. This includes inter and intra-objective coordination as well as vertical coordination inside each country.

### **The Action Groups**

The nine Action Groups are composed of representatives from national, regional and local administrations – mostly empowered with decision making capacity (DMC) – as well as so-called ‘advising guests’ that can enrich the expertise that is needed for an effective implementation work.

The Action Groups are the main drivers of day-to-day implementation of the Strategy.

### **State of play and next steps**

The Launch Conference on the EUSALP under the Slovenian Presidency took place in Brdo, Slovenia on 25-26 January 2016<sup>18</sup>, jointly organised by the Slovenian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the European Commission and marked the beginning of the implementation phase of the Strategy.

The first meeting of the EUSALP Executive Board<sup>19</sup> took place on 19-20 April 2016 in Brussels and a second one in Koper (Slovenia) on 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> September 2016<sup>20</sup>. All nine Action Groups already had their Kick-off meetings<sup>21</sup> and all nine Action Group Leaders gathered for the first time in Brussels on 15-16 June 2016<sup>22</sup>. A second meeting of the Action group Leaders (the so called BAGL – Board of Action Group leaders) took place in Izola, Slovenia on the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> of September 2016<sup>23</sup>.

The Presidency of the Strategy is set up on an annual rotating basis. The Presidency provides political leadership at General Assembly and represent the Strategy at all levels and also provides a political link with the institutions of the EU and the participating States and Regions.

It's also a Presidency responsibility to organising the annual General Assembly. The same presidency applies to the Executive Board. The first presidency is held by Slovenia in 2016, followed by Bavaria in 2017. There is already a proposal of Austria to hold the presidency in 2018 and Italy in 2019 (not yet endorsed by the general Assembly).

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<sup>18</sup>Brdo Launch Event

<sup>19</sup>Minutes EB1

<sup>20</sup>Minutes EB 2

<sup>21</sup>Minutes AG's meetings

<sup>22</sup>Minutes 1<sup>st</sup> AGL meeting

<sup>23</sup>Minutes 2<sup>nd</sup> BAGL

## RESULTS

The EUSALP is still in its initial phase. Since the launch of the strategy, activities have so far essentially consisted in putting into place effective governance structures as well as devising a straightforward protocol for identifying processes, actions and projects that can contribute to the strategy's objectives.

## EVENTS

- **Mediterranean Coast and EU Macro-regional Strategies Week** – Koper and Izola, Slovenia - After the successful EUSALP Launch Conference and the constitutive session of the EUSALP General Assembly in January 2016 at Brdo, the **Mediterranean Coast and Macroregional Strategies Week** is the second in a series of events organised by Slovenia during its presidency of EUSALP. **From 23 September to 1 October 2016**, the Slovenian Coast was the venue for numerous events on environmental connectivity and the meeting place of [various stakeholders co-creating our common space in the region](#).
- **Launch conference** on the European Union Strategy for the Alpine Region held in Brdo (Slovenia) on 25 and 26 January 2016;
- **Stakeholder conference** on the European Union Strategy for the Alpine Region, held in Milan on 1 and 2 December 2014;
- **Stakeholder conference** on the European Union Strategy for the Alpine Region, held in Innsbruck on 17 September 2014;

## DECLARATIONS AND JOIN STATEMENTS

- Grenoble declaration - 'Political Resolution towards a European Strategy for the Alpine Region' adopted in Grenoble on 18 October 2013,
- Milano declaration
- Brdo Declaration

**STUDIES** 'New Role of Macro-Regions in European Territorial Cooperation', published in January 2015 by the European Parliament's Directorate-General for Internal Policies (Department B: Structural and Cohesion Policies),

## OTHER ACTORS

### European Parliament

- On 23-5-2013, a resolution was voted in the European Parliament for the creation of a Macro-Regional Strategy in the Alps.
- The European Parliament's Committee on Regional Development adopted a report on EUSALP <sup>24</sup>(rapporteur: Mercedes BRESSO) voted in the plenary in autumn 2016.

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<sup>24</sup>Bresso's report

- After the endorsement of the EUSALP by the Council, a group of MEPs has founded the **'Friends of EUSALP'** group.

They met already 4 times:

- 1<sup>st</sup> meeting
- 2nd meeting - 18 April 2016.
- 3th meeting
- 4<sup>th</sup> meeting – 19 October 2016

### **Overview of a selection of existing cooperation structures in the Alpine Area:**

The main transnational bodies already intervening in the Alpine Region are:

- The **Interreg Alpine Space Transnational Programme (ASP - 2014TC16RFTN001)** <sup>25</sup> is a European transnational cooperation programme for the Alpine region. The participants Member states are: Germany, France, Italy, Austria and Slovenia and the programme counts also with participation from two non-member states: Liechtenstein and Switzerland). The area covered by the programme is mainly the same territory as the EUSALP;

The programme is financed through the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) as well as through national public and private co-funding of the Partner States.

The budget of the programme for the 2014-2020 period is €139 million, from which € 116.635.466 came from the ERDF.

The Priority axes and Investment Priorities of the programme are the following:

- Priority Axis 1 "Innovative Alpine Space"
- Priority Axis 2 "Low Carbon Alpine Space"
- Priority Axis 3 "Liveable Alpine Space";

The programme will directly contribute to the Strategy's implementation through its thematic priority axes (aligned with the Strategy's priorities). It also supports Strategy's governance mechanisms and structures, through a specific project – ALPGOV <sup>26</sup>.

- **The Alpine Convention** - - The Alpine Convention is an international treaty , signed by the Alpine States (the 7 Alpine States concerned by the EUSALP and Monaco) as a treaty under international law, in 1991 and has since provided a platform for cross-border co-operation. The EU is a Contracting Party to the Alpine Convention and it has been decisive in drafting some of its protocols.

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<sup>25</sup>Alpine Space Programme

<sup>26</sup>AlpGov Project - The AlpGov project was submitted to the Interreg Alpine Space Programme with the aim of supporting the Action Groups and the implementation of the EUSALP. This project was adopted by the Alpine Space Programme Committee on 6 June 2016 in Lugano, Switzerland. The allocation for this **project is XXX€**



It works at promoting sustainable development in the Alpine area and at protecting the interests of the people living within it. It embraces the environmental, social, economic and cultural dimensions. It is organised around four bodies: the Alpine Conference is the political decision-making body of the Alpine Convention, formed by Ministers of the participating countries. The Permanent Committee is the executive body of the Alpine Conference and ensures that the Convention's decisions, principles and aims are put into practice. The Permanent Secretariat, established in 2003 with its main office in Innsbruck and a branch office in Bolzano/Bozen, provides support to the decision-making organs of the Convention, favours the exchange of experience and knowledge about the Alps and is in charge of public relations for the Alpine Convention. Finally the working groups and platforms are set up according to the current needs of the Convention. Their responsibility consists of developing new protocols, recommendations and implementing measures, study ongoing developments as well as reporting progress to the Alpine Conference and Permanent Committee. 12 thematic priorities have been identified in 1991 and have been made operational through protocols, working groups, research activities and joint initiatives-projects calling for multi-level governance approaches.

Differently from the Alpine Strategy which encompasses the whole Alpine territory (around 450,000 KM<sup>2</sup> and approximately 80 million inhabitants), the Alpine Convention applies only to the core mountainous area of the Alpine Region (an area of around 190,000 Km<sup>2</sup> with approximately 14 million people living in the area). As the perimeter of the Alpine Region was chosen as it is the one where the common challenges of the Alpine area – related to a mountainous territory only, the perimeter of the Alpine Convention cuts across the area of most of the large Alpine regions (Rhone-Alps, PACA, Piemonte, Lombardia, Veneto, Bayern, and Salzburg). As a consequence, only part of the territory of these regions is subject to the Alpine Convention and only a few regions are entirely covered by the Alpine Convention (Vorarlberg, Tirol, South-Tirol, Trento Province, and Aosta Valley). The largest cities included are Grenoble, Innsbruck, Trento, Sondrio, Bolzano, Chambery and Lugano.

**CIPRA (International Commission for the Protection of the Alps)** - CIPRA is an autonomous non-governmental, non-profit umbrella organisation that has been committed to the protection and sustainable development of the Alps since 1952. With its international executive office in Liechtenstein, its representatives in seven Alpine states and around one hundred member organisations and institutions CIPRA today represents an important alpine-wide network. Their action aims at bringing about a sustainable and ecological future for the Alpine region. The main themes for action are Biodiversity & Landscape, Climate & Energy, Transport & Mobility and Youth.

- **The Arge-Alp initiative (Association of Alpine States)** is an association of 10 states, provinces and cantons of Austria, Germany, Italy, and Switzerland. The members are, from Austria: Salzburg, Tyrol, and Vorarlberg; from Germany: Bavaria; from Italy: South Tyrol, Lombardy, and Trentino; from Switzerland: Graubünden, St. Gallen and Ticino. The association represents 23 million people within the area of about 142,000 km<sup>2</sup>. It was founded on 12 October 1972 in Mösern near Telfs in Tyrol. Its main objective is to

strengthen the cooperation and opportunities in the Alpine Region. Topics of common interest include cultural, environment and ecological development.

- **The Zurich Process** - The Zurich group is the formal platform of cooperation of the Ministers of Transport of the Alpine countries. In the light of the tragic accident in the St. Gotthard Tunnel at the end of October 2001 and disasters in other tunnels (Tauern), the transport ministers of Germany, Italy, France, Switzerland and Austria signed the joint Declaration of Zurich on 30 November 2001. This Declaration was drawn up in response to a Swiss initiative and was signed in the presence of representatives of the European Commission. The purpose of the Declaration is to encourage alternative means of transport and improve road safety (especially in Alpine tunnels). Since October 2001 the ministers have met three times, on 11 May 2004 in Regensburg, on 14 November 2005 in Sedrun (both under Swiss presidency) and on 20 October 2006 in Lyon (under French presidency), when Slovenia joined the group as a member. The adoption of the EU Directive on Safety Requirements for Tunnels in European Road Networks (Austria held the chair of this working group) and an agreement to jointly commission a study regarding an "Alpine Crossing Exchange" were some of the most important successes achieved under these presidencies.
- **Alpe-Adria.** Alpe-Adria is a bioregion in Central Europe, embracing all of Slovenia, the Austrian states of Carinthia and Styria, and the Italian regions of Friuli-Venezia-Giulia and Veneto. As of 2004, it is the subject of a proposal to create the world's first organic bioregion. Italy and Austria are leaders in organic farming, both having over 10% organic agriculture as of 2004. Slovenia has far less of its land under organic cultivation, although between 1998 and 2003 their organic sector grew from less than 0.1% of Slovenian agriculture to roughly the European Union average of 3.3%.
- **Euroregio** - In 2011 the European Region Tyrol-South Tyrol-Trentino was founded, as the first EGTC in Austria, the second one in Italy and the 21st in the European Union. The purpose of the EGTC is to foster and facilitate trans-border, trans-national and interregional cooperation between the Tyrol, South Tyrol-Alto Adige and Trentino.
- **COTRAO** – Is an association based on a protocol agreement between France (Rhône-Alpes and Provence-Alpes-Côte d'Azur), Italy (Valle d'Aosta, Piedmont and Liguria) and Switzerland (cantons of Geneva, Valais and Vaud). Its main purpose is the exchange of information and co-ordination of solutions and problems regarding the interests of the member cantons and regions as well as the implementation of internal projects. The association is engaged in the areas of education and culture, industry, research and technology, tourism, transport and communications, environment and Alpine affairs.

### Documents

- Commission communication of 28 July 2015 concerning the European Union Strategy for the Alpine Region (**COM(2015)0366**);
- the accompanying action plan and supporting analytical document (**SWD(2015)0147**),

- Regulation (EU) No 1303/2013 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 17 December 2013 laying down common provisions on the European Regional Development Fund, the European Social Fund, the Cohesion Fund, the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development and the European Maritime and Fisheries Fund and laying down general provisions on the European Regional Development Fund, the European Social Fund, the Cohesion Fund and the European Maritime and Fisheries Fund and repealing Council Regulation (EC) No 1083/2006(1) (the Common Provisions Regulation or CPR), **OJ L 347, 20.12.2013, p. 320.**
- Regulation (EU) No 1299/2013 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 17 December 2013 on specific provisions for the support from the European Regional Development Fund to the European territorial cooperation goal; **OJ L 347, 20.12.2013, p. 259**
- Regulation (EU) No 1302/2013 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 17 December 2013 amending Regulation (EC) No 1082/2006 on a European grouping of territorial cooperation (EGTC) as regards the clarification, simplification and improvement of the establishment and functioning of such groupings, **OJ L 347, 20.12.2013, p. 303**
- **Council conclusions** of 19 and 20 December 2013 on the European Union Strategy for the Alpine Region,
- Opinion of the European Economic and Social Committee of 8 October 2015 on the Commission communication concerning a European Union strategy for the Alpine Region, **OJ C 32, 28.1.2016, p. 12.**
- opinion of the Committee of the Regions of 3 December 2014 on an Alpine macro-regional strategy for the European Union , **OJ C 19, 21.1.2015, p. 32**
- Resolution of the Committee of the Regions of 3 July 2012 on the evolution of EU macro-regional strategies: present practice and future prospects, especially in the Mediterranean, **OJ C 349 E, 29.11.2013, p. 1.**
- Resolution of the Committee of the Regions of 23 May 2013 on a macro-regional strategy for the Alps **OJ C 55, 12.2.2016, p. 117.**
- Report on the governance of macro-regional strategies (**COM(2014)0284**), of 20 May 2014 from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions
- Commission communication of 26 January 2011 'Regional policy contributing to sustainable growth in Europe 2020' (**COM(2011)0017**),
- Council decision 96/191/EC of 26 February 1996 concerning the conclusion of the Convention on the Protection of the Alps (Alpine Convention),
- 'An Investment Plan for Europe' (COM(2014)0903), Commission communication of 26 November 2014 to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Central Bank, the European Economic and Social Committee, the Committee of the Regions and the European Investment Bank entitled

***The Alps are a "rich" region. Why is it necessary/appropriate for the EU to deal with this region by way of a new macro-regional strategy?***

The Alpine region, globally, is one of the richest areas of Europe. Bavaria, Lombardy, Veneto, Rhone-Alpes are among the economically most dynamic areas of the EU. The neighbouring non-EU States (CH and FL) are among the richest countries in the world. The Alpine Region also hosts some of most innovative and competitive regions and cities of EU (Baden-Wurttemberg, Bayern, Rhone Alpes, Lombardia)

But the Alpine Region is also Europe's largest mountain range with low population densities, high degree of seasonality for some touristic areas and ageing populations.

Still, there are several reasons which make the Alpine area a suitable area for a macro-regional approach. In the 6<sup>th</sup> Periodic Report on the social and economic situation and development of the regions of the EU, the Alpine Space is described as "an area with strong industrial areas in the peri-alpine belt as well as high added value services especially in the alpine core area, high spatial density of universities and research centres, a good level of accessibility regarding links between regions and their respective countries and high level of work force qualification. The core alpine area faces a strong population decrease with the resulting loss of economic attractiveness. Nevertheless, strong disparities exist on a small scale level, which are not visible from data on Nuts II level. Due to topographically determined disadvantages such differences occur especially in the mountain areas, even within a distance of few kilometres".

*In a context of environment and strong cultural heritage, the main challenges of the area could be summarized as: the increasing environmental burdens along the transport corridors, farm abandonment, depopulation and ageing trends and the natural hazards problematic. To respond to those challenges, specific integrated and land use management measures are required to the whole area, especially with regard to managing the impact of tourism activities (tourism is a key-sector only in selected areas in the Alpine Space (very concentrated) and it's too a potential source of conflicts), the crossing of major transport corridors, or the intensive urbanization processes in certain areas (peri-urban, for instance).*

**1. Highly not homogeneous economic and social conditions within the Alpine regions**

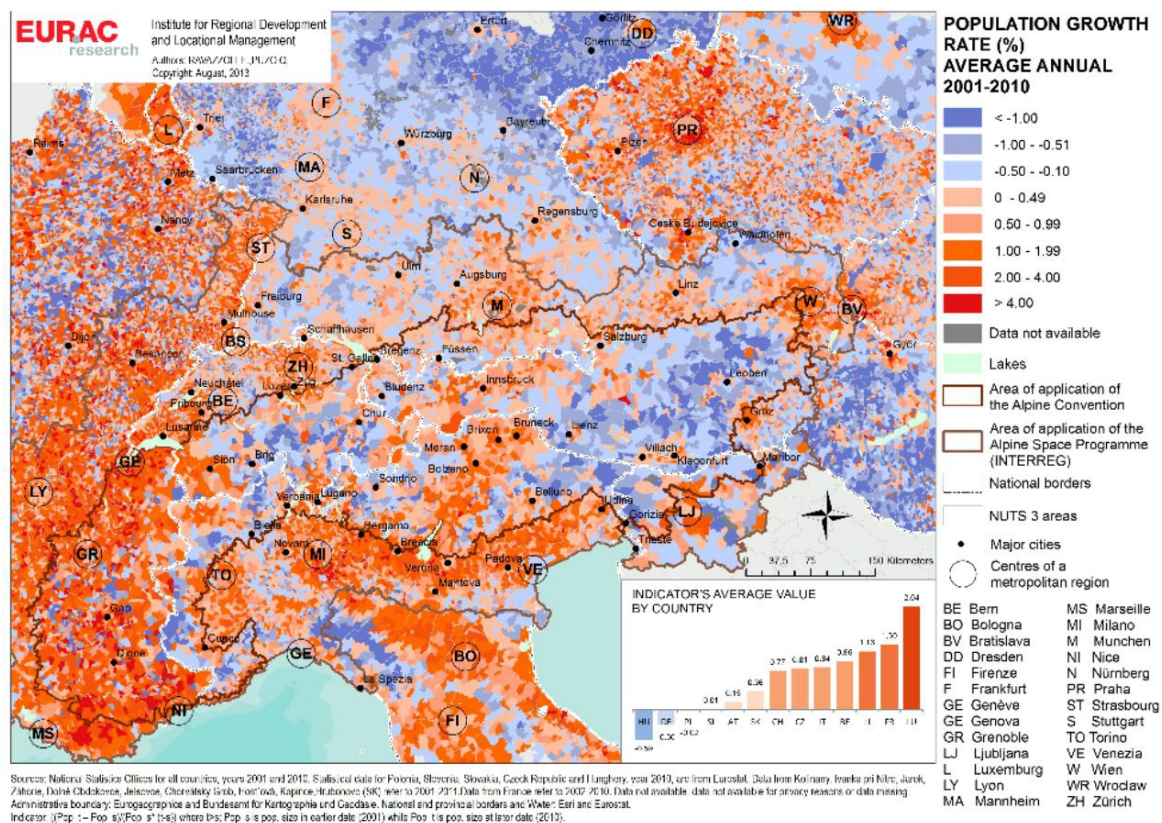
Despite the overall good economic performance of the Alpine area, meaning 450,000 KM2 and around 80 ML inhabitants), clear differences not only in terms of topography, but also in terms of economy can be observed. For instance, there are very significant differences of GDP and access to services within this area: **the large metropolises (Milan, Vienna, Munich, Zurich, Lyon, Marseille, Geneva, Strasbourg, Turin and Venice) and their surrounding areas generate a large share of the GDP of the area and benefit from well-developed networks of infrastructures and services.**

On the other hand **remote areas and particularly mountainous areas** - with some exceptions (top tourism destinations) – **lag behind both in terms of economic development and availability of services of general interest or infrastructures.** Education (including primary and secondary schools) and health-related services are not necessarily available in the vicinity of resident population. The

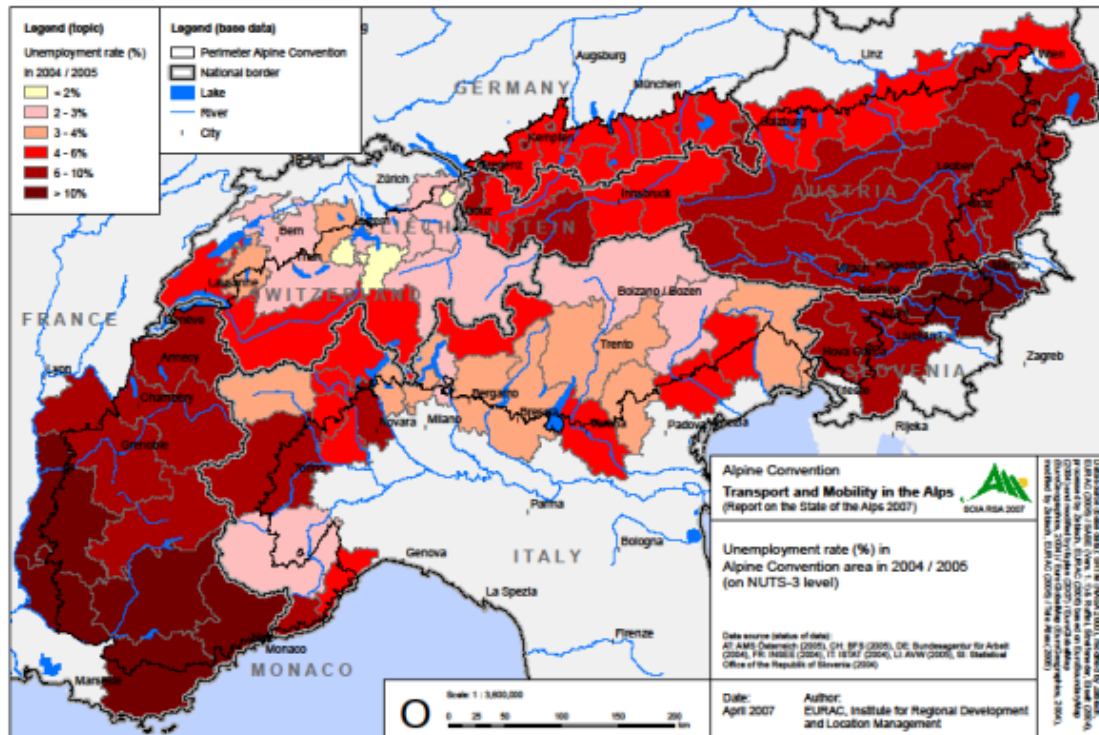
varying conditions for employment opportunities and service supply are mirrored by the recent patterns of demographic development, as the charts below indicate. The abandonment of remote areas has a direct impact on the possibilities to preserve the territory (preventing natural hazards) and local traditions/culture.

Since these disadvantaged areas are often the most valuable from a nature-protection point of view, the development of infrastructures in these areas is subject to particular precaution and often contradictory opinions. Dilemmas often occur between "preservation" and "development". This is a common issue across the Alpine regions and it can best be approached by way of a coordinated strategy, relying both on territorial cooperation and on a consistent approach in the use of public and private funds. Acting together, the Alpine regions increase their chances to turn the current challenges into opportunities.

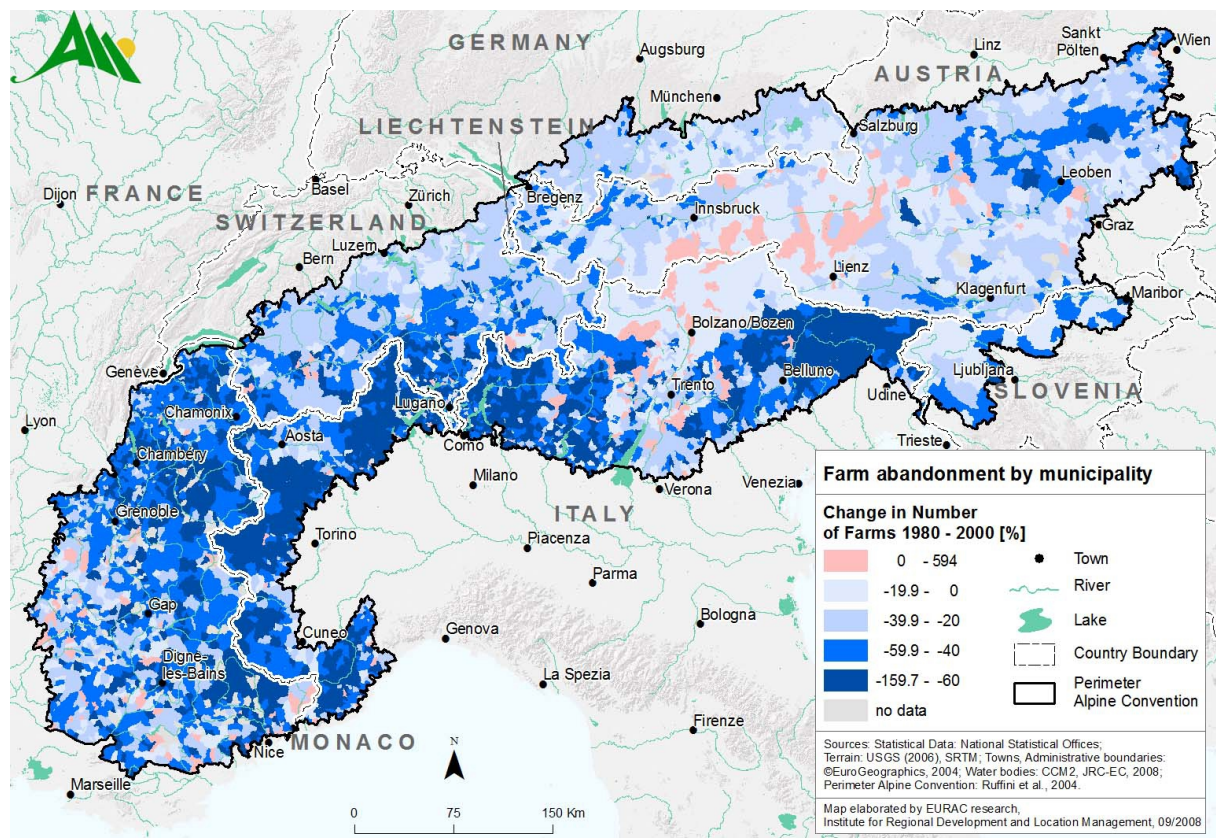
As an example, an integrated network of vocational schools (based on full reciprocal recognition of diplomas) would facilitate the arising of professional profiles which are adapted to the needs of the regional production structures (tourism, handicraft, agriculture).



limited to the territory of the Alpine Convention)











Smoothing the inequalities within the "globally rich" Alpine regions would not only allow to guarantee similar life conditions to the population in the entire area, but would also, in addition, free resources for further improving the overall economic performance of the Alpine Regions, which would be better able to cooperate and create the conditions for growth - to the benefit of the whole Europe.

**In a nutshell: the alpine regions are overall rich, but significant differences exist within their territories, which, besides requiring a common response, absorb resources and limit the overall potential of growth.**

## **2. Equitable access to resources and benefits**

The Alps represent one of the most important water towers of Europe and the second largest biodiversity reservoir after the Mediterranean Sea. They also provide invaluable landscape and cultural heritage. These resources are largely used and exploited.

Still, the population residing in the remote areas – providing resources and amenities – **are not necessarily equitably rewarded for the ecosystem services their territories provide to the rest of the region and to Europe as a whole**. This leads to further decline in the population in remote areas with dramatic effects on soil stability, biodiversity conservation and culture preservation. This has negative effects in the surrounding areas (e.g. floods).

The clearest example relates to the use of water resources for hydropower. Concessions are largely owned by companies in large metropolises and the economic gains from hydropower (which is a low labour-intensive sector) do not go to the benefit of the population residing where the water resources are mainly located. Issues of "landscape use" in relation to wind-farms have also arisen recently. In general, the Alps are a favourable location for renewable energy, but this has a significant impact on the territory and the eco-systems. In this respect, two dimensions overlap: the prudent use of land, which is necessary in order not to compromise landscape and biodiversity; and the moral dimension of "ownership" of natural resources by the residing population. Another example relates to transport: large road transalpine infrastructures have an extremely negative impact in terms of noise and air pollution in mountainous areas, while the profits of tolls are not necessarily benefitting the residing population in these areas. In order to address these issues consistently and avoid "cascade effects" (traffic restrictions in one area immediately have effects in other parts of the Alps) a coordinated approach is indispensable.

**In a nutshell: a new "solidarity pact" is necessary in order to make the use of Alpine resources to the benefit of all.**

## **3. Streamlining of structures (ex. Zurich Group – WG transport)**

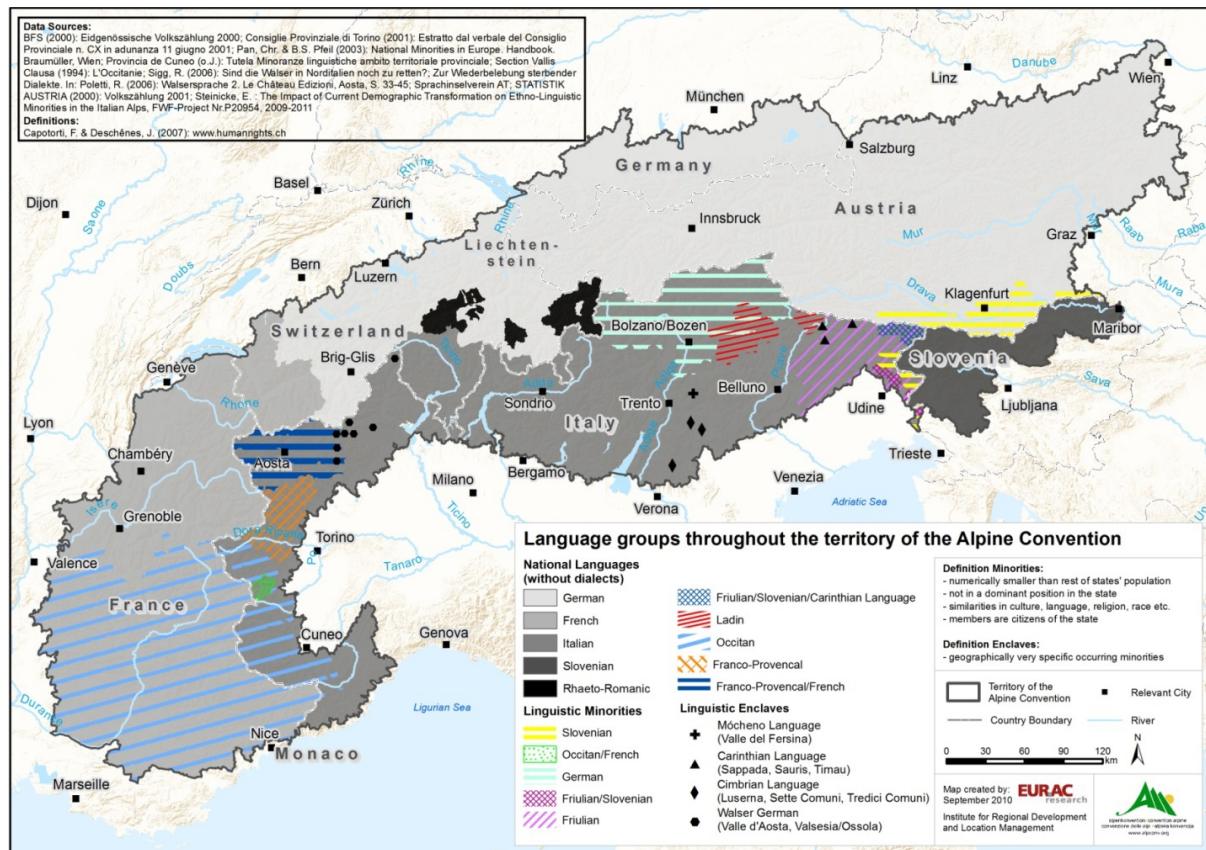
The above-mentioned challenges have been identified since a number of years by now (the first transregional organization in the Alpine area, **ARGE-ALP**, dates from 1972), and as a consequence a considerable number of cooperation structures is already operating (Arge-Alp, Alpe-Adria, Cotrao, Alpine Convention, Euregio, Alpine Space Programme and other *ad hoc* structures such as the "Zurich Group").

What is, however, missing, is an **overall strategy ensuring the consistency between existing initiatives** and avoiding duplications.

An example is the "Zurich Group" set up among Alpine transport ministries after the 1999 accident which led to a 3-years closure of the Mont-Blanc tunnel between Italy and France and the Working Group on transport set up in 2000 by the Alpine Convention. The two structures deal largely with the same issues. The existence of an overall strategy for the Alpine Regions, in the form of an action plan laying down a limited number of strategic priorities, would facilitate cooperation and allow for synergies among the current structures and organisations and bring saving of resources. Once again, this is a good example of resources which could be better used for fostering the objective of a sustainable growth.

#### 4. Exploiting the unused potential

The Alpine area is traditionally seen as a main destination for recreational tourism. Although recreational, and especially winter tourism, has largely contributed to economic development (in several cases with significant negative impact on the environment and landscape), there is still a great potential for sustainable natural and cultural tourism. As an example, the Alps are extremely rich and diverse in local cultures, as the map below shows. A concerted approach to sustainable tourism – for instance addressing problems related to seasonality of tourism - would considerably contribute to growth and jobs of the whole Alpine region.



## 2. Geographical scope of application

Linked to point 1 above, the issue of the geographical scope is also crucial.



## 3. Sectoral focus

Although the Alpine Convention applies to 12 sectors (population and culture, spatial planning, agriculture, forests, nature protection, soil, tourism, energy, transport, water, air, waste), **it was born as an environmental Treaty**. Its focus is still predominantly on environmental issues (nature conservation and connectivity, climate change, water management), although economic issues like tourism and transport are also addressed. There is a request by the regions to provide for a wider strategy encompassing the three pillars of sustainable development in the same way, even if it is widely recognized that the challenges linked to the environmental pillar remain of outstanding importance, also in view of creating jobs and fostering growth.



## Conclusion

By way of conclusion, one may say that the common challenges which are at the origin of the Alpine Convention remain largely topical and need concerted action. The Alpine Convention, mainly due to the 3 factors above, is limited in its effectiveness in tackling these challenges. Without a comprehensive involvement of the area surrounding the Alps, several challenges will remain problematic. This is why the EUSALP concept is based on the **recognition that the core area of the Alpine regions is the "common element" justifying a MRS approach but at the same time that addressing this common element requires the involvement of the "enlarged" alpine area.** Issues like ownership of water resources and transport (transit in particular) cannot be solved without a concerted effort extending beyond the borders of the Alpine Convention (illustrations below).

