

Evaluation Plan for the EU Strategy for the Danube Region (EUSDR)

Version 2.0 | May 2021





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1. Introduction

The EU Strategy for the Danube Region (EUSDR) is a macro-regional strategy adopted by the European Commission (EC) in December 2010 and endorsed by the European Council in 2011. The EUSDR was jointly developed by the EC, together with the Danube Region countries and stakeholders, in order to address common challenges together.

The evaluation plan of the EUSDR sets out the evaluation strategy for the entire implementation period of the Danube Strategy Point (DSP), taking into account the lessons learnt from the implementation since 2010 and the respective reports from the EC about the EUSDR and the implementation of macro-regional strategies.

The evaluation plan (version 1.0 from January 2019) was developed following the discussions leading to the preparations of the revision of the EUSDR Action Plan under the Bulgarian Presidency and in the light of the Priority Area Coordinator's (PACs) and National Coordinator's (NC's) reports to the EC in 2018. The evaluation plan was drafted by the DSP and adopted by the NCs in January 2019.

In 2021, the evaluation plan needed to be updated to reflect the developments and processes that have taken place since the adoption of the original plan.

The present evaluation plan (version 2.0) has been developed by the DSP in close coordination with the steering group for evaluation (SG DANUVAL), taking into account the adoption of the revised EUSDR Action Plan in 2020, the process of embedding the EUSDR into EU funding programmes, the ongoing efforts for strengthening the monitoring of the Strategy, as well as the COVID-19 pandemic.

Following the adoption of the EUSDR evaluation plan by the NCs, it will be conducted by the DSP together with interested parties such as NCs, PACs, the Commission and external partners/experts. Progress of the implementation will be reported to the NCs, the PACs and the Commission. The evaluation plan (or relevant parts of it) as well as the outcomes of the evaluations may be published on the EUSDR website in consultation with the NCs.

New evaluation needs might occur during the lifetime of the DSP and shall be subject of a decision on the EUSDR's NCs. Therefore, the evaluation plan shall be regularly reviewed and be adapted according to the needs of the key implementers of the EUSDR.

2. Evaluation activities

2.1. Objectives

The evaluation activities aim at

- enhancing the governance of the Strategy
- providing an evidence-base for macro-regional processes and workflows, as well as the needs for transnational governance in the macro-region
- improving the effectiveness and the impact of the Strategy
- strengthening the stakeholder's involvement
- enhancing the communication flows
- reinforcing the Strategy's capacity to bring about change in the macro-region

- providing an appropriate input to the revision of the Strategy's Action Plan in 2019/2020, as well as lay the ground for future revisions in accordance with the needs of PACs, NCs, the Commission, and other stakeholders
- enhancing the accountability of the Strategy by providing a neutral input from external experts

2.2. Types of Evaluations

Following the discussions in the NC group of 25 May 2018, the joint PAC/NC meeting on 26 June 2018, the SG DANUVAL meeting on 14 February 2019, and respectively, the timeline of the revision of the EUSDR Action Plan, the Strategy has decided to conduct the evaluation in two parts:

Q1-Q2 2019	– A governance/operational evaluation, assessing the effectiveness, communication and stakeholder involvement of the Strategy; considering the discussion of the governance of macro-regional strategies started by the Commission in 2014 ¹ ;
Q2/2021- Q2/2022	– A policy/impact evaluation, assessing EUSDR instruments (tools) and activities (processes) for (measuring) the impact in the Danube region.

3. Coordination and Implementation

The DSP, in close cooperation with interested parties such as PACs, NCs, the Commission as well as other bodies involved in the evaluation of the EUSDR, is entrusted to coordinate the evaluation process. To support the process, the steering group SG DANUVAL was set up, consisting of the following group (to ensure that the group remains operational, the number of participants should however be restricted; NCs should decide on the concrete number):

- the European Commission (DG REGIO/D1 and DG JRC);
- the TRIO-Presidency (NCs);
- One PAC per EUSDR Pillar representing the entire Pillar;
- thematic experts in the field of the evaluation of MRS (e.g. from ESPON, or representatives from other MRS);
- representatives from DTP programme bodies.

The SG DANUVAL fulfils the following functions:

- deciding upon the terms of reference for the selection of evaluation experts;
- representing the Strategy's stakeholders and allowing their participation in the implementation of the evaluation plan;
- providing expertise to support the implementation of the evaluation plan, e.g. by providing input on the evaluation process and on the terms of reference for the selection of evaluation experts; facilitating whenever possible access to information, data and/or data sources useful for the evaluations; reviewing the evaluations reports; proposing and monitoring of follow-up measures based on evaluation findings.

¹ COM(2014) 284 final

Different stakeholders may be invited as support to the SG, depending on their respective expertise and relating to

- the EUSDR Action Plan revision;
- the internal and external communication of the EUSDR;
- capacity building activities;
- the EUSDR monitoring.

Such representatives could be the Strategy's key implementers (if not regularly participating in the SGs) or administrative staff from bodies relevant for specific policies, external experts, social partners, or other bodies responsible for promoting social inclusion, gender equality and non-discrimination. The communication flows shall be ensured by the DSP, of whom one key task will be to ensure the smooth interaction between existing knowledge about the macro-regional scale and operational interrelations, territorial monitoring, and the revision of the Action Plan. This interaction requires a sound coordination in terms of both time and content, whereby an innovative combination of a top-down and a bottom-up process shall lead to spill-over effects.

3.1. Synergy with other strategies and initiatives, and operational programmes

Synergies shall be sought with the other three MRS, as well as sea-basin strategies. Particular attention shall be paid to the interfaces of cooperation and investment, as well as policy makers and bilateral, international, and regional initiatives. The synergies with other MRS are of particular importance with regards to embedding MRS and aligning funding sources with them.

The DSP supports the exchange of information and coordination with the other MRS via Interact's Working Group on 'building common capacity support environment for enhanced implementation of the MRS' and its sub-groups. Furthermore, direct coordination and cooperation with other MRS takes place according to demand, e.g. with the EUSBSR on the subject of monitoring. Should other MRS also decide to implement an evaluation, the DSP will be coordinating with them.

Synergies between MRS can also be found in relevant ESPON studies and projects (especially the territorial monitoring tool MRS. ESPON as well as the project on "Territorial Scenarios for the Danube and Adriatic Ionian Macro-regions TEVI 2050", where an interim delivery is planned for summer 2021).

3.2. Source of evaluation expertise

The evaluation is to be carried out within a mixed framework of internal and external expertise.

The DSP plays a facilitating role and takes into account the needs and available resources of the PACs (and their SGs) and NCs. Moreover, the DSP plays a role of operational coordination and supervision. DSP's Evaluation officer coordinates all evaluation matters with the key implementers of the Strategy and the Commission and drafts the Terms of Reference (ToR) for the evaluations to be conducted.

One main aspect of the proposed evaluations is to consider *existing* expertise, be it from the key documents published by the EU institutions, the EUSDR itself (the key implementers of the Strategy such as the PAs, EUSDR Presidencies, the DSP, etc.), academia, consultants, programmes and others. This is also in order to ensure the cost-efficiency of the evaluation exercise. Both the use of internal and external expertise could bring about the expected results.

The help of external experts is needed in particular to assess the complex environment of the EUSDR governance and its relationship to the existing governance of the EU. The external experts are functionally independent from the key implementers of the EUSDR. Based on the requirements of the EUSDR, the evaluation experts will be in charge of the methodological and quality aspects. They can also support the evaluation capacity building process, e.g. by organising peer reviewing, elaborating guidance, aggregating the findings of the evaluation, providing meta-evaluation and making in-depth analyses when necessary.

3.3. Data collection

Considering the availability of existing data, setting up a monitoring system is of great importance. In order to conduct an in-depth evaluation, a more comprehensive monitoring of the EUSDR is needed. Due to the delay of the revised Action Plan from June 2019 to April 2020, the subsequently postponed process start of aligning the priorities from the Action Plan to the EU funding priorities 2021-2027, as well as the following intensive process of embedding the EUSDR into EU funding programmes, the implementation of the newly established monitoring concept has been postponed to 2022. This new monitoring system, which is intended for a comprehensive data collection every second year from 2022 onwards, should be the basis for future evaluations.

Despite this, there has been enough material and data available to be used for the evaluations. All EUSDR key implementers and stakeholders are invited to provide further relevant studies, reports etc. to the DSP and to participate in evaluation activities carried out by the service providers (external experts), such as interviews or online surveys.

The aim of ensuring the quality, optimising evaluation efforts and costs, synergy among existing evaluations, studies, (territorial) monitoring as well as ongoing/future revisions of the Action Plan shall be ensured.

The operational evaluation, which was carried out from April to June 2019, is based upon various data sources. The source of information for the operational evaluation were, among others:

- existing reporting from the PACs and NCs, such as reports to DTP, to the EC, or to DSP;
- academic literature (especially those from the EUSDR context);
- reviews of law and funding;
- evidence-base provided by the DG JRC and ESPON EGTC (or similar projects);
- studies on the EUSDR, with a specific focus on the following (non-exhaustive):

Year	Author	Title
2014-2015	ZEW/IAW/WIIW	Socio-Economic Assessment of the Danube Region: State of the Region, Challenges and Strategy Development
2015	European Parliament	New role of macro-regions in European Territorial Cooperation
2016	Interact	Embedding macro-regional strategies
2017	Interact	Added value of macro-regional strategies
2017	Interact	Making the Most of Macro-regions (especially chapter 2 on Monitoring and Evaluation)
2017	EC	Macro-regional strategies and their links with cohesion policy

2018	Interact/HA Capacity EUSBSR	How do macro-regional strategies deliver: workflows, processes and approaches
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Based on the document analysis, a summary of the state of the art of academic literature on macro-regional strategies and a reflection of the wider political-economic developments of the EUSDR was done.

In addition to desk research, an online-survey was conducted. The target group of the survey included PACs, NCs, representatives of the EC, authorities working in the field of programme management (e.g. managing authorities or Joint Secretariats of ESIF OPs) and other stakeholders considered as relevant (e.g. representatives of universities).

To double-check the information from the online-survey and to go into more detail, semi-structured interviews with key implementers of the Strategy, the EC, programme representatives and multipliers (civil society representatives, economic sector etc.) were conducted.

Further details of the data and information collection, including a characterisation of online-survey participants and a list of interview partners, are presented in the final evaluation report.

For the policy/impact evaluation, source of information could be, among others:

- Reporting from PACs and NCs to the EC (2020) and reporting from PACs to the DTP (2020)
- EUSDR Implementation Report (2020)
- EUSDR Operational Evaluation (2019)
- EUSDR Governance Architecture Paper (2020)
- Rules of Procedure of the EUSDR National Coordinators (2020)
- Joint Statement of the Ministers responsible for the implementation of the EU Strategy for the Danube Region (2020)
- EUSDR Communication Strategy (2020) and EUSDR Communication Guide (2020)
- EUSDR Consolidated Input Document of the Danube Countries for the Revision of the EUSDR Action Plan (2019)
- Relevant ESPON studies and projects (especially the territorial monitoring tool MRS. ESPON as well as the project on “Territorial Scenarios for the Danube and Adriatic Ionian Macro-regions TEVI 2050”, where an interim delivery is planned for summer 2021)

The following official documents are i.a. to be taken duly into consideration (non-exhaustive list):

Document Number	Institution	Title
SWD(2020) 59 final	EC	Commission staff working document - ACTION PLAN - EU Strategy for the Danube Region
COM(2020) 578 final	EC	Report from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions on the implementation of EU macro-regional strategies
SWD(2020) 186 final	EC	Commission staff working document Accompanying the document report from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the

		Committee of the Regions on the implementation of EU macro-regional strategies
13424/20	Council	Conclusions on the Implementation of EU Macro-regional Strategies

Documents published by the European Parliament and its Research Service, the Committee of the Regions, and European Economic and Social Committee should also be considered, whenever appropriate. This also applies to statements of ministers adopted outside the Council, but in an EUSDR framework.

Based on the specifications of the EUSDR (as defined in the Evaluation Plan and the Terms of Reference for the selection of a service provider, and further specified during the kick-off meeting), the experts contracted for the evaluation are asked to propose appropriate methodologies for data collection and analysis such as desk research, interviews, case studies, online surveys, etc., ensuring also the involvement of all relevant stakeholders.

3.4. Involvement of stakeholders

The involvement of stakeholders will be ensured e.g., by the EC's consultation, and in line with the partnership principle. Moreover, the above mentioned Steering Group DANUVAL will be as representative as possible.

Especially in the second step – the impact/policy evaluation – different stakeholders and experts could be involved to ensure the transparency and the quality of the process.

3.5. Human resources

The head of DSP and the evaluation officer are going to coordinate the process. Additional staff members, especially the pillar officers, will be involved to liaise with the PAs (SGs). The communication officer will ensure the communication of the outcomes and respective capacity building measures will be coordinated with the capacity building officer. Key stakeholders of the EUSDR (NCs, PACs) are kindly asked to cooperate in this regard within the framework of their time resources.

3.6. Selection of service provider

The terms of reference (ToR) for the selection of evaluation experts will be developed for each evaluation separately. ToR should include some background and context information, the awarding procedure, specification of services and evaluation questions, time schedule, required qualifications of the evaluation experts, assessment criteria, as well as the required content of the offer.

The DSP is in charge of drafting the ToR, in close cooperation with the SG DANUVAL. The ToR will be published on the EUSDR website.

4. Conducted and planned evaluations

The EUSDR has decided to analyse in a first step the operational capacity of the EUSDR by focussing on the efficiency and effectiveness of the EUSDR's governance system, considering and deepening the bi-annual reports of the EC² and the discussion started on the Governance of MRS. The aim was to enhance the accountability of the Strategy, to highlight its added value and thereby to contribute to the Action Plan revision of the EUSDR. Its results were considered in the revision of the EUSDR Action Plan in 2019/2020. The governance/operational evaluation was conducted in spring 2019 (Q1-Q2) and based upon existing data resources, reports and studies as well as an online survey and interviews with EUSDR stakeholders. It went hand in hand with the EC's consultation procedure and the development of a new monitoring concept.

In a second step, a policy/impact evaluation will be conducted in 2021, which may also provide input to another potential revision of the Action Plan.

Both steps should be done as theory-based evaluations. The method and data available will be specified for each evaluation question separately. The DSP, in cooperation with the SG DANUVAL will specify relevant data in the Terms of Reference. The final proposal on the evaluation method shall be made in the offer by the service provider.

The operational evaluation focused primarily on the EUSDR's governance, following the discussion started by the Commission.³ It primary answered the questions: What works and how? What does not and why?

Examples of questions for the operational/governance evaluation (the final set of questions has been proposed by the experts and can be found in the final evaluation report):

Operational Evaluation	PACs and their SGs	NCs
Politics	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> How were the European institutions involved in the activities? To what extent was the EUSDR considered in bilateral/ international formats? How was the minister's level involved in the Strategy (e.g. stakeholder conferences etc.)? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Is /was the EUSDR part of any governmental agreements (coalition pacts)? Is the EUSDR considered in external affairs/cooperation strategies of your country? What has been / should be done to maintain the political commitment?
Policy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Which are the most important factors that constitute the added value of the EUSDR? How high is the added value of the EUSDR? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> How was the EUSDR considered in Council formations, their preparatory bodies and/or in political documents?

² Report from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions on the implementation of EU macro-regional strategies

³ COM(2014) 284 final

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Did the PA produce impact on national/supranational/regional law? If yes, how? • How were line DGs involved in the implementation? • Which kind of change the EUSDR engender in your policy field? • How was the Strategy considered in the relevant Council formations, their preparatory bodies and/or in political documents?? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Did the Strategy have an impact on national/regional/local planning processes? • Did the Strategy affect national or regional laws, regulations or organisational structures?
<p>Technical implementation</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Which additional stakeholders would be needed? • How were project chains developed and how was the continuity of projects ensured? • How can the workflows and processes among the key implementers of the EUSDR be assessed? • How transparent and formalised are the workflows/processes? • Which workflows/processes work well and which should be improved? • Are the SGs composed appropriately? • How can the involvement of the SGs in the PA be assessed? • Which are the success factors and main obstacles for a strong involvement of the SG? • Which are the main gaps hampering a sound implementation? • How intensive is the cooperation between key actors in the EUSDR? How has cooperation intensity changed over time? How can the cooperation structures be described? • Have the Strategy's structures been efficient in ensuring a well-functioning communication flow in the DR? • To what extent do the communication and PR tools meet your information needs on the EUSDR? • How helpful / informative are the communication and PR tools used by the EUSDR? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Is there a national EUSDR platform in place? • How was the national report to the EC compiled? • Are civil servants appointed to the EUSDR's SGs throughout the line ministries or employees of private companies or the academia?? • Is the EUSDR part of the organigrams of ministries? Are there new forms of cooperation/workflows? Is the EUSDR of strategic focus for institutions / units dealing with external affairs? • How was civil society involved into the EUSDR implementation? • Which are the main gaps in the technical implementation of the EUSDR in your country / in general? • How was the Strategy covered in the media? • How did the trio-presidencies of the EUSDR work?

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How visible is the EUSDR for the different target groups? • To what extent do the current communication and PR activities highlight the added value of the EUSDR? 	
Financial	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Which funding sources were identified and which forms of cooperation sought? • Which cross-funding initiatives are there to be found? • How were the mainstream OPs addressed? • How were centrally managed EU funds addressed? • How were private funds considered? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How did national/regional funding sources/ development cooperation sources consider the EUSDR? • Which cross-funding / cross-funded initiatives are there to be found? • Were there EUSDR-related calls?

The policy/impact evaluation should focus on the revised EUSDR Action Plan 2020 and the embedding process. Furthermore, the technical implementation, the Communication Strategy and changes in the strategic dimension of the Strategy should be taken into account. It should primarily answer the following questions:

- What influence does the COVID-19 pandemic have on the implementation, impact and communication of the Strategy? What has changed and what should be adapted for the future?
- Are the actions and targets as defined in the revised EUSDR Action Plan coherent, realistic, appropriate and relevant? What should be modified and when (next Action Plan revision)?
- How are the Priority Areas proceeding in reaching (or planning to reach) their set targets? What should be changed in order to ensure that the objectives will be achieved?
- What (policy) impact can be expected to be generated by the Strategy on national, regional or EU level?
- How does/can the Strategy contribute to wider policy objectives (e.g. Sustainable Development Goals, European Green Deal, Digitalisation, Post-Covid Recovery, EU enlargement and neighbourhood policy etc.)?
- How efficient is the EUSDR embedding process in terms of programming (planning phase)? Which role is the Strategy (EUSDR and MRS in general) going (expected) to play in the Partnership Agreements and EU funding programmes 2021-2027?
- What tools and processes would be helpful to improve the implementation of the EUSDR? How practicable and efficient will the planned monitoring system (based on the current draft of the PAC reporting tool) be for monitoring the progress and achievements of the Strategy?
- Are the measures agreed in the Communication Strategy appropriate for the selected target groups? Do the EUSDR's communication measures reach the relevant target groups efficiently?
- Which narratives have been successful in promoting the EUSDR on the political level?

In order to answer these questions, they need to be broken down to a more detailed level.

The final set of questions as well as the methods for data collection and involvement of all relevant stakeholders are to be proposed by the evaluation experts. Depending on the methods chosen, this could lead to a set of questions similar to what is depicted below (indicative, non-exhaustive):

Policy evaluation	PACs and their SGs	NCs
Policy development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What change in the Danube Region has been generated by the PAs? • Are there new (coordinative) mechanisms which were initiated in the EUSDR context? • What is the (expected) contribution of the PAs to wider policy objectives (such as SDGs, EU Green Deal, Digital Transition, EU enlargement and neighbourhood policy)? • What impact have the activities carried out by the PAs on EU (sectoral) policies? • Did the PAs have impact on national/supranational/regional law? If yes, how? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How has the EUSDR changed the mind-set and political discourse? • Did the Strategy have impact on laws, regulations, organisational structures or planning processes on the different levels (national, supranational, regional)? • Is the EUSDR considered in external affairs/cooperation strategies of your country? • What has been / should be done to increase the political commitment towards the EUSDR? • What should be done/ changed to increase the general impact of the EUSDR?
Action Plan	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Are the targets as defined in the AP coherent, realistic, appropriate and relevant for the DR? • What is the level of progress towards the targets? Which milestones have been reached so far? • Which major projects/processes have been implemented? • What other/continued interventions would be needed? • What influence does the COVID-19 pandemic have on the implementation of the AP? • What is being done (should be changed) to ensure that the set goals are/will be achieved? • When would another revision of the AP be useful and feasible? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Are the actions and targets as defined in the Action Plan coherent, realistic, appropriate and relevant for the Danube Region? • What needs to be modified and when? • What other interventions would be needed for the Strategy?

<p>Technical implementation</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What are the main gaps in the implementation of the PAs? • What tools and processes would be helpful to improve the technical implementation of the Strategy? • According to the current draft, how practicable and efficient will be the planned monitoring system for reporting the progress and achievements of the PAs? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Is there a national/state level platform for MRS in place? • Based on the current draft, how efficient is the planned monitoring system (PAC reporting tool) for monitoring the progress and achievements of the Strategy? • What other tools and processes would be helpful to improve the implementation of the Strategy? • Which are the main gaps in the implementation of the EUSDR in your country / in general?
<p>Communication</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Are the measures agreed in the new Communication Strategy appropriate for the target groups? • Do the EUSDR's communication measures reach the relevant target groups efficiently? • How did communication change due to the COVID-19 pandemic? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Which narratives have been successful in promoting the EUSDR on the political level? • Are the measures chosen in the Communication Strategy appropriate? • Do the communication measures reach the relevant target groups efficiently?
<p>Embedding</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What activities have been carried out to ensure that relevant EUSDR priorities are included in 2021-27 planning and programme documents (Partnership Agreements, ERDF/ESF/IPA/NDICI programmes at national and regional level, territorial cooperation and CBC programmes)? • According to your knowledge, how were the objectives (strategic topics) of the EUSDR considered in the regional and national EU funding programmes 2021-27? • (How) are centrally managed EU funds going to be addressed? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How have EUSDR stakeholders (NCs, PACs, SG members) been involved in the programming of national/regional funding programmes 2021-2027? • What is the role of the EUSDR in the Partnership Agreements? • To what extent is the EUSDR (expected to be) reflected on the level of specific objectives of the ESIF OPs? • How are instruments outside the framework of cohesion policy considering the EUSDR?

5. Timing

The following table depicts EUSDR monitoring and evaluation activities related to the development of the revised EUSDR Action Plan and reporting requirements.

Currently, PACs and NCs are reporting to the EC via the questionnaire for the reports on the implementation of the four EU macro-regional strategies⁴ every second year. In addition, PACs are reporting to the DTP (project reporting) every 6 months. The new monitoring tool, which is planned to be implemented in 2022, aims to incorporate the different reporting formats.

Year	Reporting/Development	Monitoring & Evaluation
2018	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• NCs & PACs to EC• PACs to DTP	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Conceptualization of the Evaluation Plan
2019	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Development of the new Action Plan• PACs to DTP	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Conducting Operational Evaluation• Development of a new monitoring concept
2020	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Adoption of the revised Action Plan• NCs & PACs to EC• PACs to DTP	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Further development of the new monitoring concept
2021	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• PACs to DTP	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Update of the Evaluation Plan• Conducting Policy/Impact Evaluation
2022	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• NCs to EC• PACs to EC via the new monitoring tool• PACs to DTP	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Finalising Policy/Impact Evaluation• New Monitoring in place

⁴ Report from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions on the implementation of EU macro-regional strategies