

SLOVENIA - Initial NC input to revision of EUSAIR and its Action Plan

Slovenia and its EUSAIR National Coordination would like to share the first insight into the process of the revision of the EUSAIR action plan.

EUSAIR is not the first MRS that we were involved in the revision; we were following very closely the revision process of the Danube strategy and we share our thoughts also based on this experience. In the process of the Danube strategy revision, during its very long process we have witnessed from time to time that the process was more important than the content, and we have, to our mind, lost our focus few times during the process. This should be important lesson learned also for the EUSAIR revision.

What we can say is that the time to take stock where we are with the EUSAIR and its action plan is now right. Namely, we are implementing the EUSAIR already for 6 years and the external environment, global and European, have gone through dynamic challenges during this short period.

The approach to the revision of our strategy and its action plan should be, to our mind very cautious. **As we say in Slovenia, we need to do it with a shaking hand.**

Why? Let us elaborate on three arguments.

1 - ROBOUSTNESS of EUSAIR and its AP

6 years is not a long period, and yet so many critical things were going on in the world during this time:

- We started our joint EUSAIR work when we all were still recovering from the economic and financial crisis;
- Soon we were confronted by migration crisis, Adriatic Ionian region was heavily affected by it;
- The last two years we are confronted with world pandemic – the covid 19 crisis, where again our macro region is severely hit in all aspects; just look at the tourism sector and its impact on our GDPs;
- We still didn't come out of covid crisis, and a new one - the energy rising crisis in knocking on our doors.

Four major crises during the 6 years of our work within the EUSAIR. Despite the devastating consequences of these crisis, we did deliver within the EUSAIR, we were not stopped. *It seems the Strategy and its Action plan are robust enough to be able to deliver meaningful results even in a drastically changing environment.* And this is an important notion when we are addressing possible revision.

2 – CONTENT RELATED

Europe strategic orientation can be summarised with key words such as: SMART, GREEN, CONNECTED, SECURE and RESILIENT.

When we look at EUSAIR, our main topics, we also have *smart, connected, green* but also *secure and resilient*. Our pillars are organised around these topics, but through the interpillar coordination and multilevel governance all the pillars contribute to EU top strategic orientations.

In general, we could note that the EUSAIR content is after 6 years of implementation very much in line with common European strategic orientation and it is up to date.

Is there something of major importance still missing? I do not know; it does not come to my mind; here mostly we would need opinion of the TSGs, if they miss something crucially important that due to Action Plan they cannot work on.

At the beginning, we were missing a bit more of social & society oriented actions, like education, skills, employment... But no more, as TSGs gradually introduced them into their scope of work. Just look at sustainable tourism education and skills flagship, or introduction of green connectivity into educational curricula of school and universities, or activation of youth through the network of technological parks in all EUSAIR countries, that together with the educational institutions and mentors stimulate young (14-29) to develop and compete on most creative business ideas. I speak of POPRI powered by EUSAIR project.

So again, we have a feeling that the EUSAIR content is STILL very much in line with common European strategic orientation.

3 – THE DRIVING FORCE, THE MACHINE - THE GOVERNANCE SYSTEM

If we look at the last 6 years, the first three we needed more or less to set up EUSAIR governance structure, to make TSG operational, so people participating in the work of steering groups had common understanding what they should do and how. It was not easy, as mostly they were left on their own to develop their work method. In addition, we (GB/NCs) motivated them to avoid silos approach and to try to cooperate cross pillars, too. Again, the work method and its ownership had to be developed within the TSGs and pillars.

And it was. Now, after 6 years we could be very proud of the results that we have achieved within the EUSAIR. Many important cases were presented and discussed today.

EUSAIR was frontrunner in respect of reaching the agreement on the flagships. It means reaching the consensus among all participating countries on the very limited list of topics that are of strategic importance for entire region and that we all agree, we will do our best to ensure also financial means by allocating national and EU funds under national responsibility to these topics. This is major achievement. It was possible because at the level of TSGs mutual respect and mutual trust has been created among participating members and notion that together we can do better. This is our driving force.

We need to look at *key factors influencing the driving force behind the EUSAIR implementation*. We would definitely say they the pillar coordinators and TSG members are the driving force, together with indispensable support of EUSAIR Facility Point and FP project partners that supports them in every step as they grow, form administrative support to capacity building, project facilitation to communication and visibility. EUSAIR Facility Point is the enabler of the driving force.

This structure is relatively young and thus fragile; we should be aware of that. It functions based on mutual respect and trust among the members of the TSG, among the pillar coordinators. Sometimes, maybe too often, the delivery still very much depends on personal involvement and lead of some individuals.

With the revision, we should not endanger the structure by changing their work environment *without previous in-depth consideration on what works and why and what not. We should not be too ambitious, but rather very careful.* We should be very sensitive of their needs and suggestions and try to accommodate them to the best of our possibility. *One wrong move can do a lot of harm to still very fragile governance structure and our common capacity to deliver.*

To summarise:

yes it is the right moment to look at the EUSAIR and its Action plan, but we need to do it open-minded and with shaking hand for the TRUE benefit of EUSAIR and its stakeholders on the ground.