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Macro-Regional Strategy and Territorial Cohesion in the European Union

Avrupa Birliği'nde Makro Bölgesel Strateji ve Teritoryal Uyum

Abstract

The European Union (EU), which aims to promote cross-border cooperation (CBC) through various policies and programs, introduced its first macro-regional strategy (MRS) in 2009 as a new tool that offers an integrated framework and governance for regional cooperation beyond the national scale. With adoption of MRS, the EU seeks to tackle common problems of certain regions at the transnational scale and improve the efficiency of policies by enhancing territorial cooperation and coordination among the local, regional, national and supranational levels and mobilizing the existing cross-border institutions and initiatives. This way, it is intended for achieving a more prosperous space and strengthening the territorial integrity of the EU. Thus, MRS is closely related to territorial cohesion policy that is based on creating a balanced and harmonious societal structure on a place-based approach. In this framework, this study addresses the contribution of MRS to the territorial cohesion of the EU by elaborating on the fundamentals and objectives of territorial cohesion policy and MRS.

Keywords: European Union, Macro-Regional Strategy, Territorial Cooperation, Territorial Cohesion.

Öz

Çeşitli politika ve programlar yoluyla sınır ötesi işbirliğini geliştirmeye çalışan Avrupa Birliği (AB), ulusal ölçeğin ötesinde, bölgesel işbirliğinin geliştirilmesine yönelik olarak bütünleşik bir yapı ve yönetim ortaya koyan ilk makro bölgesel stratejisini (MBS) 2009 yılında kabul etmiştir. MBS'nin kabul edilmesiyle AB, yerel, bölgesel, ulusal ve uluslar üstü düzeyler arasındaki teritoryal işbirliğini ve koordinasyonu artırarak

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ve mevcut sınır ötesi kurum ve girişimleri harekete geçirerek ulus aşırı ölçekteki belli bölgelerin ortak sorunlarının çözümünü ve politikaların etkinliğini arttırmayı hedeflemektedir. Bu şekilde daha müreffeh bir mekân oluşturulması ve AB'nin teritoryal bütünlüğünün güçlendirilmesi amaçlanmaktadır. Bu bakımdan MBS, yer merkezli bir bakış açısı çerçevesinde dengeli ve düzenli bir toplumsal yapı oluşturulmasına dayanan teritoryal uyum politikasıyla yakından ilintilidir. Bu bağlamda bu çalışma, teritoryal uyum politikasının ve MBS'nin temel niteliklerini ve hedeflerini ortaya koyarak MBS'nin AB'nin teritoryal uyumuna olan katkısını ele almaktadır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Avrupa Birliği, Makro Bölgesel Strateji, Teritoryal İşbirliği, Teritoryal Uyum.

Introduction

The EU considers spatial and territorial issues themselves as policy matters. It attaches an increasing importance to adding a territorial dimension to various policy areas and improving territorial cooperation. In this framework, the EU seeks to achieve a balanced and sustainable development across its territory through joint initiatives of local and regional authorities of the member states. This way, it is aimed at promotion of the territorial integrity of the EU and specification of optimal policies, considering the particular characteristics of places (Wassenberg and Reitel, 2015).

On the basis of the statements above, regions in Europe have increased their role in decision-making processes, and many CBC initiatives have been founded across national boundaries. The EU seeks to improve the efficiency of CBC and regions through developing specific programs to facilitate the functioning of the single market and improve its socio-spatial integration (Perkmann, 1999, p. 658). So, cross-border regions (CBRs) or Euroregions which present an institutional framework to establish cooperation across the national borders for political, social and economic actors have emerged in the territory of the EU.

CBC initiatives which are essentially an institutional learning process (De Sousa, 2013) are supported by the cohesion policy of the EU (Medeiros, 2013). The EU have adopted various policies to achieve territorial cooperation and improve its territorial cohesion. The MRS of the EU is among policy initiatives for improvement of cooperation and coordination between policies and between actors in Europe. It offers an integrated framework and new governance for regional cooperation at the transnational level. The first strategy, the EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region (EUSBSR), was accepted in 2009. Then, the strategies for the Danube Region (EUSDR) in 2010, the Adriatic and Ionian Region (EUSAIR) in 2014 and the Alpine Region (EUSALP) in 2015 were adopted (EC, 2017b). These strategies seek to enhance the territorial development of the defined macro-regions (MRs) by establishing multi-objective cooperation and coordination between policies that have spatial effects and between actors.

This study addresses the contribution of MRS to the territorial cohesion of the EU by elaborating on the fundamentals and objectives of territorial cohesion policy and MRS. Territorial cohesion aims to establish a harmonious territorial development throughout the territory of the EU, ensure territorial integration and promote cooperation between

territories at different levels. MRS is mainly towards enhancement of the territorial integrity of the EU at the transnational level and achievement of a more prosperous space through establishment of territorial cooperation among the local, regional, national and supranational levels. Though its components are mostly sectoral, MRS may promote the territorial cohesion of the EU since it seeks to improve cohesion of regions beyond the national scale, considering the particular characteristics of places in the defined MRs.

Territorial Cohesion: Promotion of a Harmonious Development

The cohesion policy which is *“the only policy of the European Union that explicitly addresses economic and social inequalities”* (EC, 2004, p. XXV) has covered a large part of territories and peoples of the member states since it entered into the EU’s agenda towards the end of 1980s (Leonardi, 2005, p. 1). Cohesion, which has social, economic and territorial dimensions, aims to improve the living conditions of EU citizens in a just, balanced and equitable societal structure. It is the political expression of achieving socio-economic goals at the EU level (Yılmaz, 2020a, p. 223). The EU seeks to establish a balanced and coherent societal order in a pluralist and democratic political structure in its territory where the functioning of the market is provided and communities may benefit from the emerging prosperity. It is intended for creating a solidarity at the EU scale through redistribution of wealth (Molle, 2007, p. 108). Territorial cohesion is the spatial dimension of this societal structure.

The concept of regional development lies at the basis of the cohesion policy. The interest in elimination of regional disparities was politically included in the EU’s agenda with the Treaty of Rome (Brunazzo, 2016, p. 17). However, until the 1970s, the regional policy of the EU was mainly under the control of the member states. Moreover, it did not have an evident spatial outlook. Rather, it was about supporting uncompetitive producers and non-mobile labor in the peripheral areas (Nanetti, 1996, p. 63). In the 1970s, implementation of redistribute policies entered into the EU’s agenda for eliminating the imbalances between regions, and regional policy gradually moved to the EU level through reforms between 1979 and 1984 (Brunazzo, 2016, p. 20).

The most important development to strengthen the capability of the EU concerning identification and implementation of regional policy was the reform package in 1988 which is the foundation of current cohesion policy (Bachtler and Wren, 2006, p. 145). With the approval

of the package, firstly, the amount of funds for elimination of regional disparities was risen, and the influence of the EU on conducting the process was strengthened. Secondly, the reform incorporated the Commission, national, regional and local authorities and relevant stakeholders into the process. Another development that influenced the progress of regional and cohesion policies was the Maastricht Treaty. It confirmed the centrality of cohesion policy in reducing socio-economic disparities between regions and expanded the role of the Commission in achievement of social and economic cohesion. The foundation of the Cohesion Fund as a structural instrument was also specified (Brunazzo, 2016, p. 22-24). Additionally, the contracting parties agreed on establishment of the Committee of the Regions which provides a voice for regions and localities in the EU (Leonardi, 2005, p. 60).

Though regional policy is at the core of cohesion, there are also differences between them. What distinguishes cohesion from the member states' and the EU's regional policy is about the establishment and implementation processes. Regional policy is mostly carried out by national administrations and specialized agencies while conduct of cohesion policy rests on involvement of formal units and socio-economic groups at different levels. Secondly, planning and territorial issues have been on the agenda since the emergence of cohesion policy. In this sense, actions such as reducing regional disparities, conducting territorial (impact) analysis, creating jobs and supporting private investment are among the fundamentals of cohesion policy. Thirdly, in addition to regional disparities, cohesion also deals with the functioning of the territorial structure of the EU as a whole. This way, it is aimed at establishment of connections between regions or territories at different levels. Lastly, the social dimension of cohesion policy is more evident. Cohesion adds a social dimension to the integration process (Davoudi, 2007; Hepburn, 2016; Leonardi, 2005; Medeiros, 2016a, 2016b).

Territorial cohesion, which is regulated as a shared jurisdiction between the EU and the member states by the Treaty of Lisbon (Yılmaz, 2020a, p. 225), considers territory as an agent in implementation of policies (Yılmaz, 2020b). In other words, it is "*associated with 'opening-up the territory', identifying and strengthening the economic development potential of all territories in order to activate their endogenous potentials for achieving sustainable economic growth*" (Finka, 2007, p. 26). Unlike economic and social cohesion, it is a policy which principally focuses on places rather than sectors, and its success depends on evaluation of the effects of

sectoral policies on places in which people live. It is complementary to economic and social cohesion, and its main goal is to ensure territorial integration and promote cooperation between territories at different levels. So, territorial cohesion is aimed at creating a balanced, harmonious, effective and sustainable territorial structure and strengthening the territorial condition of the EU in the long term (Yılmaz, 2020a, p. 226-227).

It may be seen that territorial cohesion is a two-sided policy. On the one hand, it is attached to equity and balance. On the other hand, it seeks to enhance the territorial capital (Schön, 2005, p. 393). This way, it is aimed at ensuring the endogenous development of territories (Finka, 2007, p. 26-28). *“It is thus a very specific policy involving a transfer of resources between Member States via the budget of the European Union for the purpose of supporting economic growth and sustainable development through investment in people and in physical capital”* (EC, 2004, p. XXV). However, territorial cohesion is not only about achieving specific goals and adding a territorial dimension to various policy areas; it is also based on conducting governmental processes on a territorial basis. In other words, it involves implementation of governing in a place-based manner. Hence, place-based or territorial governance is one of the basics of territorial cohesion (Stead, 2013; Well and Schmitt, 2015).

Macro-Regional Strategy: Establishment of Large-Scale Cross-Border Cooperation

MRS is essentially aimed at establishment of large-scale CBC in the international context through surmounting existing institutional barriers and *“seeks to combine the community’s territorial cooperation and cohesion policy repertoire with intergovernmental ‘regional cooperation’ involving European Union member and partner countries.”* The agenda of MRS is quite extensive and includes in promotion of cross-sectoral and trans-boundary policy coordination in various areas such as transport infrastructure and environmental protection (Gänzle, Stead, Sielker and Chilla, 2019).

The narrative of MRS may be handled in different perspectives (Piattoni, 2016). However, it may be claimed that its development is pursuance of CBC initiatives in Europe (Gänzle, 2016). CBC is closely related to the regional policies of the EU. In general, this situation may be evaluated as a reflection of the increasing importance of regions in national states of (Western) Europe following the end of World War II. European states started to consider regions more seriously as an

element of the modernization process. From 1950s to 1980s, there was a top-down regionalization, and regional policies were mainly governed by the state. However, a new regional approach on a more bottom-up basis has come up with globalization, transformation of state and the European integration process since the 1980s (Keating, 2003).

The new approach on regionalism may be viewed as an initiative to promote the autonomy of regions and participation of local actors in policy-making processes. The EU has a significant effect on this development through achievement of a single market and implementation of a more effective regional policy (Özel, 2004). Thus, CBC in Europe is closely related to the European integration process (Perkmann, 2002). In fact, it has started to appear in Europe since the mid-1950s. The first official CBR was established in 1958 on the Dutch–German border. Then, new CBRs were founded. Since the 1990s, with improvement of the financial capability of the EU to support CBC and introduction of interregional cooperation (INTERREG) programs, the number of CBRs has risen. So, many CBRs which are varied in terms of geographical scope, cooperation intensity and types of actors involved have blossomed out throughout the territory of the EU (De Sousa, 2013; Perkmann, 1999, 2003).

INTERREG programs have an important effect on institutionalization of CBC in Europe. The Commission introduced INTERREG in 1990 as a part of the structural and investment policy of the EU, the purpose of which is to support regional and local governments to deliver better policies throughout the territory of the EU. From 1990 to 2020, five programs, INTERREG I (1990–1993), INTERREG II (1994–1999), INTERREG III (2000–2006), INTERREG IV (2007–2013) and INTERREG V (2014–2020), were accepted to improve territorial interconnections in Europe. With the approval of INTERREG III, the program has been divided into three separate strands as INTERREG A, INTERREG B and INTERREG C. The first concerns improvement of economic and social cooperation in adjacent border regions. The second supports transnational projects such as new energy or infrastructure lines. It is aimed at forming cooperation among national, regional and local partners to ensure territorial integrity. The last one is an interregional program. It functions at Pan-European level and encompasses all the member and non-member states such as Norway and Switzerland. INTERREG C seeks establishment of interregional networks to provide regional development and cohesion (Reitel, Wassenberg and Peyrony, 2018).

INTERREG is a significant initiative to disseminate the EU's values to border-regions and achieve territorial cooperation that may basically be defined as a policy to improve the living conditions of EU citizens through joint initiatives of local or regional authorities of the member states (Wassenberg and Reitel, 2015). In this sense, INTERREG promotes territorial cooperation by supporting CBC. In particular, the period of 2007-2013 strengthened the territorial dimension, and achievement of territorial cooperation was regarded as one of the objectives of INTERREG (Gänzle, 2016, p. 385). Therefore, INTERREG bolsters the constitution of a multi-level structure through bringing the Commission, the member states, regional and local units and relevant stakeholders together. Since it binds sub-national actors to the EU level and spatially encapsulates the whole territory of the EU, INTERREG also enhances the supranational idea in Europe (Reitel et al., 2018, p. 15-16).

Considering developments on CBC, the EU's MRS seeks to solve common environmental, economic or security problems in particular regions (McMaster and Zwet, 2016, p. 50). The basic motive of MRS is achievement of interconnected policies which are implemented separately in a geographically defined area (Piattoni, 2016, p. 88). This way, it is aimed at enhancement of cooperation in isolated regions. In other words, MRS is *"a unique integrated framework to address common challenges faced by a defined geographical area covering Member States and third countries which thereby benefit from strengthened cooperation contributing to the achievement of economic, social and territorial cohesion"* (CEU, 2017, p. 2). Thus, rather than a funding strategy, it is a specific initiative which deals with various policy fields ranging from navigation, climate change, biodiversity and infrastructure to economic development, education, skill development, tourism and civil security (Gänzle et al., 2019, p. 163-164).

Definition of Macro-Region

Region is one of the key concepts of geography. Though it is prevalently employed in different disciplines, its meaning is controversial (Tomaney, 2009). Moreover, position, structure and functions of regions may differ from state to state in terms of politics and law (Özel, 2003). In fact, a region is basically *"a spatial unit that is somehow distinguishable from the surrounding areas."* It may be seen *"both as a mental category that can be used in classification and as a real-world unit"* (Paasi, 2009, p. 214). Such a definition, albeit rather simple, does not offer much about the

functions of region and its position in polities that occupy a certain area. However, with its spatial and organizational existence, a region is a spatial entity that mediates between various levels in a polity. In other words, whether it is subnational, transnational or international, a region is *“a spatial partial unit of medium size and intermediary character whose material substratum is based on territory”* (Schmitt-Egner, 2002, p. 181). The fact that it has a territorial basis signifies boundedness or classification since territory is fundamentally a demarcated (administrative) geographical area (Yılmaz and Koyuncu, 2019). Thus, a region, at least for this study, may politically and organizationally be operationalized as a partial space which is defined or classified and has an intermediary function between larger and smaller units.

MR, just like the concept of region, is a complex concept, and its meaning is not agreed upon. The concept is harnessed in different ways depending on time and geographical context. For instance, MR (macroregiuni) signifies the administrative regions in Romania. From a historical point of view, the concept, in the disciplines of international relations and political science, has had a political feature that marks the geopolitical divisions in the world. In particular, in the political milieu that emerged after World War II, it was mainly used for establishment of groupings of national states such as the EU and the Association of Southeast Asian Nations. It is obvious that such a usage which is state-centric implies political homogeneity and indicates that states which have more commonalities or goals come together beyond the national scale in the world. However, as it is specified previously, this approach to MR has changed on the basis of new regionalism. MR does not only mean homogenous territories or units but denotes heterogeneity and encompasses subnational units and stakeholders (Dubois, Hedin, Schmitt and Sterling, 2009; De Lombaerde, 2010; Gänzle and Kern, 2016a; Mirwaldt, McMaster and Bachtler, 2011).

Looking at how the concept is used in the EU, the Commission defines MR as *“an area including territory from a number of different countries or regions associated with one or more common features or challenges.”* In this sense, a MR contains several regions in several states. Moreover, the number of member states should be significantly fewer than those in the EU as a whole (EC, 2009, p. 1). Therefore, the concept is inherently transnational concerning the scale of territorial cooperation: *“A [m]acro-[r]egion ... is a region that covers a very wide (transnational) territory”* (Medeiros, 2013, p. 1254). In other words, *“macro-regional cooperation is located between the EU and the national level”* (Sielker and Rauhut, 2018,

p. 158). Although no direct scale is specified in the definition of MR, it is projected to the emergence of a transnational level.

Features and Goals of Macro-Regional Strategy

MRS is not a momentary initiative. In particular, INTERREG B underlies the macro-regional logic since the program has paved the way for establishment and consolidation of transnational networks and interactions. The idea of common interest between groups or stakeholders in certain regions has crystallized (Medeiros, 2013). MRs also represent transnational regionalism in Europe which means *"the capability of a region and its actors to shape and to use the European integration process as an arena of transnational learning in order to foster its own internal development by external cooperation (i.e., networking)"* (Schmitt-Egner, 2002, p. 190). Hence, MRs and European integration promote each other.

The EU's MRS is based on three policy principles, named as *Three No's* (EC, 2013, p. 10). The first one is *no additional EU formal structures*. As it is stated above, the number of CBRs has augmented especially since the 1990s. Various intergovernmental and regional institutions and initiatives have been founded to boost CBC in Europe. These institutions and initiatives have had an influence on establishment and implementation of MRSs (Dangerfield, 2016). For instance, the Council of the Baltic Sea States which was founded in 1992 played a leading role in the preparatory stage of the EUSBSR. It is significant in specification of priorities and provides a platform at the intersection of the EU's internal and external policies in regional cooperation (Gänzle and Kern, 2016b). Similarly, the EUSALP has been shaped in the context of three institutional initiatives which are the Alpine Convention nearly as an intergovernmental affair, the Network of Alpine Regions as a regional initiative and the Alpine Space Programme as a joint undertaking by regions and central governments (Balsiger, 2016). Thus, the EU, rather than establishment of new administrative layers, seeks to promote coordination and cooperation between the existing cross-border institutions and initiatives. The second principle is *no new EU legislation*. The EU has not provided additional new legislation for preparation and operation of MRS. The Commission prepares MRSs in consultation with the member states, and the process is endorsed by the European Council. The main guiding force is the action plans which basically deal with developments and regular updates. Implementation of priorities depends on the member states. The last one is *no new*

EU funds. The basis of this principle, although it is accepted that it is necessary to match the resources with the priorities, is improvement of coordination and more efficient use of existing resources (McMaster and Zwet, 2016, p. 50-51).

MRS covers a wide range of policy areas. It is fundamentally aimed at augmentation of trade, improvement of environmental conditions, integration of transportation networks, intensification of cultural exchanges and achievement of security. For instance, the EUSBSR have thirteen policy areas on the basis of three main objectives that are preservation of the Baltic Sea through promotion of environmentally protective measures, connection of the region through improvement of cooperation on transportation networks and augmentation of economic prosperity (Gänzle and Kern, 2016b, p. 127). Likewise, depending on their geographical position and conditions, the other MRSs have objectives that are aimed at promotion of economic development and social welfare by enhancing the attractiveness, competitiveness and connectivity of their regions (Attila, 2016; Balsiger, 2016; Cugusi and Stochiero, 2016). Thus, the basic objective of all MRSs is advancement of the living conditions in the specified regions.

MRS, though its main priorities are primarily defined by the Commission, is basically an intergovernmental initiative, and its implementation depends heavily on the commitment of the participatory states (EC, 2017b). It is organized mostly in a top-down manner (Gänzle, 2016, p. 395). The Commission and the member states (national administrations) are the major actors in the process. The Commission is regarded as the leading actor in strategic coordination of the key delivery stages and promotion of involvement of stakeholders from all levels to achieve the specified goals in cooperation with the member states. The member states are mainly tasked with implementation of policies and maintenance of political commitment (EC, 2015b, p. 10-12). However, the transnational cooperation programs of the EU basically function at the regional level and have a more bottom-up approach (Gänzle, 2016, p. 395). MRS is mainly aimed at improvement of the cooperation between the existing cross-border initiatives, as well. So, it may be claimed that it is an attempt to combine bottom-up and top-down approaches. Although the Commission and the member states are regarded as the main actors, especially in the implementation phase, regional and local authorities, economic and social actors and civil society are deemed as key stakeholders (EC, 2014, p. 11, 2015b, p. 8, 2016, p. 2). Thus, MRS politically clusters the local, regional, national

and supranational levels in a transnational and interlinked geographic scale (Stocchiero, 2010, p. 3).

Territorial Cohesion and Macro-Regional Strategy: Mobilization of Regional Cooperation and Resources

The EU has embraced a set of priorities to strengthen its territorial state. Promotion of a polycentric and balanced territorial development, encouragement of integrated development in cities, rural and geographically specific regions, territorial integration in cross-border and transnational functional regions, improvement of connectivity for individuals, communities and enterprises, achievement of global competitiveness of regions based on strong local economies and management and connection of ecological, landscape and cultural values of regions are the basic territorial priorities of the EU (The Territorial State 2011, p. 80-84). Additionally, in discussions about renewal of the territorial agenda and new cohesion policy framework beyond 2020, it has been highlighted that the existing imbalances and inequalities across the territory of the EU and increasing pressure of sustainable development and climate change should be considered by policy-makers for a more balanced Europe (Lierop, 2020). Based on these priorities which offer an action-oriented framework to strengthen territorial state of the EU, territorial cohesion is a common goal for a more coherent and balanced Europe. It is a policy that rests on the cooperation between territories at different levels as local, regional, national and transnational and between various policy areas. In this sense, MRS, considering its political objectives and way of implementation, may promote the territorial cohesion of the EU at the transnational level.

It is clear that *“the macro-regional approach is not alias for territorial cohesion”* (EC, 2009, p. 3), and the components of MRS are mostly sectoral, rather than territorial. However, both have overlapping goals. They seek to improve the living conditions of people and territorial state of the EU. Additionally, though being more sector-oriented, implementation of MRS may enhance the territorial dimension since sectoral policies may contribute to achievement of the territorial goals of the EU (BMVBS, 2012, p. 43). In fact, in addition to territorial integration, policy integration is also significant to fulfil the territorial objectives of the EU (Böhme, Doucet, Komornicki, Zaucha and Świątek, 2011, p. 23). Thus, it may be assumed that the territorial dimension is integrated into sectoral themes in MRS (BMVBS, 2012, p. 43). In other words, MRS

contributes to the territorial integrity of the EU through establishment of interconnections between policies and between various stakeholders (Dubois et al., 2009). In fact, the Council of the EU acknowledges *“the role of macro-regions in fostering socio-economic and territorial cohesion and regional cooperation including through people-to-people contacts”* (CEU, 2019, p. 3).

MRS seeks to contribute to the territorial coherence and integrity of the EU through enhancement of connections in the defined MRs. In other words, it is aimed at development of spatial interconnectedness at the transnational scale. For instance, in nearly all policy areas and horizontal actions, improvement of connections between people in the region by establishing new networks and platforms of cooperation, or by strengthening the existing ones are among the priorities of the EUSBSR. The region is attempted to be culturally and physically connected through strengthening communication, transport and energy infrastructures, as well (EC, 2015b, p. 44). Similarly, the EU seeks to enhance mobility and connectivity in the Alpine Region for maintenance of commercial activities in remote areas which suffer ageing and depopulation and provision of services such as education, health, postal and administrative services (EC, 2015a, p. 21). Advancement of connections in MRs is actually aimed at achievement of a smart and sustainable growth. That no part in the regions should remain peripheral is among the goals of MRS (EC, 2010a, p. 7). By connecting regions more, it is expected that the isolated parts of MRs shall be integrated into the EU market system.

MRS includes policy areas concerning transport, competitiveness, maritime, fishery, environment, information society, poverty and energy which have an explicit or partial spatial dimension (Böhme et al., 2011, p. 31). To illustrate, tackling climate change, encouraging sustainable development, establishing knowledge society, fighting poverty, improving mobility and connectivity are among the strategic objectives of the EUSDR (EC, 2020, p. 6). Likewise, improvement of blue technologies, maritime and marine governance, fisheries and aquaculture, maritime transport, energy networks and environmental quality are among the priorities of the EUSAIR (EC, 2014, p. 7). So, MRS is aimed at strengthening the territorial state of the EU at the transnational scale through coordination of policies with a spatial effect.

Both territorial cohesion and MRS are place-based policies (EC, 2009, p. 3). The place-based approach rests on reducing inefficiency in the long and short term due to underutilization of resources and hampering social exclusion of people in specific places. It is aimed at uncovering territorial potential and advancing territorial capital. The effective use of territorial capital requires considering the particular features of places or areas in a multi-level and multi-actor governance (Böhme et al., 2011). In this framework, as MRS rests on forming cooperation between various governmental levels and promotion of a balanced and sustainable development, it has a place-based approach to foster the emergence, consolidation and permanence of new regions (Gänzle et al., 2019, p. 164). In other words, governance of macro-regional cooperation is featured as multi-sectoral, multi-level and multi-stakeholder (Sielker and Rauhut, 2018, p. 154). MRS is towards achievement of 'added-value' for regions through forming horizontal and vertical cooperation and coordination between policy areas (McMaster and Zwet, 2016, p. 54). Thus, mobilization of resources and institutionalization of MRs in a multi-level structure are the significant parts of MRS (Piattoni, 2016). This way, it is aimed at rendering public policies more efficient in a cross-border and multi-level area through promoting cooperation between the existing institutions and effectively harnessing resources (Stocchiero, 2010, p. 3). Additionally, MRS is inherently based on flexibility in demarcation of regions and membership. Though MRs are consistently identified with common features or challenges, precisely defining the limits of regions is not a necessity. Specification of the boundaries of MRs is based on functionality, so that the most appropriate scale may be established for implementation of the proposed policies and projects (McMaster and Zwet, 2016, p. 62-63).

It should be noted that achievement of territorial cohesion entails a more functional and flexible approach (EC, 2010b, p. 24). MRS also embraces this approach. However, it is a place-based policy, and local actors are included in the cooperation process. Thus, both territorial and functional features may be observed in MRs (Gänzle and Kern, 2016a). Since territorial cohesion is a place-based policy, participation of local elites in governing processes is a prerequisite (BMVBS, 2012, p. 46-50). Governmental processes should be implemented on a territorial basis for specification of appropriate policies for places and valorization of territorial capital (Davoudi, Evans, Governa and Santangelo, 2008). MRS is aimed at development of certain regions through strengthening cooperation between various governmental

levels and relevant stakeholders, as well. Though priorities of MRS are mainly defined at the supranational and national levels, maintenance of the process in cooperation with regional and local actors for effective use of resources shows that it has a territorial basis and considers the physical impacts of policies.

Conclusion

This study has addressed the contribution of MRS to the territorial cohesion of the EU by elaborating on the fundamentals and objectives of territorial cohesion policy and MRS. Endorsed by the EU, MRS is aimed at urging the member states to mobilize existing regional cooperation initiatives and resources. The EU seeks to bring a new dynamism to transnational cooperation and increase the institutionalization of MRs as *“a new mezzanine level between the national (member state) and the supranational (community) level”* (cited in Trandafir and Panaitescu, 2016, p. 271) to improve its territorial cohesion and support the integration process.

Considering its content and objectives, it may be proposed that MRS has the potential to bring sectoral and cohesion policies closer together. The basis of the cohesion policy is to establish a balanced and coherent societal structure. The success of this structure heavily rests on the coordination and cooperation between policies, spaces and actors in the territory of the EU. Therefore, it is a process that promotes EU integration. In this framework, MRS that embraces a place-based approach may contribute to achievement of this structure at the transnational scale. Priorities and projects on the basis of sectoral policies which have spatial effects may support the territorial integrity and cohesion of the EU by improving the organizational capability of MRs.

It is clear that the intensity and efficiency of cooperation in MRs are significant for achievement of the desired goals. The fact that MRs are heterogeneous areas and their degree of institutionalization varies effects the outputs of MRSs (EC, 2017a). However, just like the previous and current CBC initiatives in Europe, MRSs are, in fact, a learning process. So, observation of the impacts of macro-regional cooperation shall be instructive for the future of MRSs. The will of national and subnational actors in establishment of cooperation and determination of optimal policies shall contribute to institutionalization of regions. Additionally, the transnational territorial cooperation programs of the EU are also significant for the development of MRSs since allocation

of resources to transnational regions shall improve the organizational capacity of MRs.

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Ek Beyan

– Makalenin tüm süreçlerinde TESAM'ın araştırma ve yayın etiği ilkelerine uygun olarak hareket edilmiştir.

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