Non technical summary

The Task Force for the preparation of the Adriatic-Ionian Programme (AIO) has developed a draft Operational Programme (OP) for transnational cooperation in line with Art. 6 of the ERDF Regulation*1*. According to SEA Directive (2001/42/EC) a Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) has been carried out. The present Environmental Report has been prepared in line with the provisions of Annex I of the SEA Directive.

Environmental status quo

The current state of the environment within which the Adriatic-Ionian transnational cooperation programme is proposed is briefly described and considered against the basis of European status reports on the environmental situation. Efforts are still needed to make improvements in respect to general soil conditions, water resources, air quality, fauna, flora and biodiversity. Technological improvements to reduce emissions are cancelled out by increasing energy and transport demand. The diversity of the natural heritage is one of the biggest assets of the programme area. Although the NATURA 2000 network has been established in most Member States during the last ten years, the loss of biodiversity has not come to a halt. Cultural landscape and heritage sites represent part of Central Europe's identity and the integration of these values into economic activities is just at the beginning.

Programme objectives and priorities

In the light of the Community Strategic Guidelines (Lisbon/Gothenburg) the overall strategic goal of the programme is to strengthen territorial cohesion, to promote internal integration and to enhance the competitiveness of the Adriatic–Ionian programme area. To achieve this goal the OP proposes the following five priorities:

Priority Axis 1 – Innovative Region – will increase transnational activity of innovative cluster and networks of key sectors of the AIO area.

Priority Axis 2 – Resourceful Region – will raise capacity for better management of energy in public buildings at transnational level, increase the share of renewable local energy sources in energy mix strategies and plans in AIO territories and increase capacity to use existing low carbon transport systems and multimodal connections among them.

Priority Axis 3 – Endowed Region– will enhance sustainable development policies for more efficient valorisation of natural resources and cultural heritage in coastal and adjacent maritime areas and maintain biodiversity and natural ecosystems through strengthening the management and networking of protected areas.

Priority Axis 4 – Cooperating on transport to better connect AIO regions – will promote a system of sustainable transport services to improve links in the Adriatic-Ionian area (intermodality of maritime, land and air transport).

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[1] Council Regulation (EC) No 1083/2006 of 11 July 2006

Priority Axis 5 –EUSAIR Governance – will support the process of strengthening and developing multilateral coordination frameworks in the AIO for joint responses to common challenges identified from the EUSAIR.

Methodology of impact assessment

The impact assessment analysis focused on the most likely significant effects of the AIO programme on the environment. There is a significant degree of uncertainty in the assessment, as the AIO programme only defines the framework and type of actions and/or projects to be supported by the programme. The implementation of the actions and the projects to be funded, and their precise nature and scope are not yet known. The analysis therefore focused on an estimate of potential and non-quantifiable impacts. The effects of these potential risks will depend on the precise characteristics of the projects, as well as on external forces.

As a transnational cooperation programme, the AIO programme will neither support heavy investments or the development of large infrastructures, nor scientific and technology research. Investment in small-scale facilities or infrastructure might be supported in the case of pilot projects and for exchange of territorial experiences. The AIO programme supports in particular intangible or 'soft' actions with potentially longer-term effects and a higher visibility for the programme area (such as, studies and research, networking, dissemination of knowledge and data, etc.).

For each area of intervention possible effects on the relevant environmental matters were analysed, with reference to 'guiding' questions and environmental protection objectives, based on legislation and strategic policies on international, state or community level. As none of the areas of intervention are described in sufficient detail to allow a quantitative assessment, the assessment concentrated on a qualitative description of possible impacts (positive, neutral, mixed or negative) on relevant environmental matters according to SEA Directive (2001/42/EC). The list of questions is not exhaustive.

The answers to these 'guiding' questions allowed us to describe the likely impact of the programme's actions depending their nature.

Moreover, this estimation was complemented for each potential impact by the following considerations:

With which probability may this impact occur?

If it happened, would the impact be frequent and/or occur in numerous areas (frequency throughout space and/or time)?

If it happened, would it be of a long-term or short-term duration?

If it happened, would the impact be reversible (or not)?

If it happened would the impact have any cross-border effects (outside AIO programme area)?

Therefore the assessment that has been carried out by this report is a strategic and qualitative assessment of potential environmental effects of the AIO programme.

Possible environmental impact of the programme

The programme addresses the most important environmental issues of the Adriatic-Ionian programme area in a positive way.

The following table summarises the potential impact ratings regarding the nature of incidence:

Priority axes and objectives		Positive impact (+)	Negative impact (-)	Neutral impact (o)	Mixed impact (+/-)	No rating (=)
PA 1	TO1 - SO 1.1	10	0	15	1	0
PA 2	TO4 - SO 2.1	7	1	18	0	0
PA 3	TO6 - SO 3.1	3	5	16	2	0
PA 3	TO6 - SO 3.2	10	0	16	0	0
PA 4	TO7 - SO 4.1	9	0	11	6	0
PA 5	TO11 - SO 5.1	0	0	0	0	26
Total		**39**	**6**	**76**	**9**	**26**

The impacts will all be of an indirect nature due to the objectives of the AIO programme and its support for 'soft' actions. The above table shows that the general environmental impact of the AIO programme is neutral-to-positive with no Specific Objective (SO) having an overall negative impact. It should be highlighted that an overall 39 rankings of the assessments of the impact of the AIO programme are positive to the environment, while the SEA identified only six negative impacts for the whole programme.

The 'mixed' or 'negative' ratings concern mostly the SOs related to tourism (SO 3.1) and transport (SO 4.1). The drafting of PA 5 - SO 5.1 is particularly wide. Without more (environmental) targeting, it was not possible to assess potential impacts.

Further negative impacts on environmental issues could not be excluded, if the programme were to support the preparation of additional transport infrastructure (road, rail, waterways). This could lead to an increase in land take, fragmentation of habitats and additional impact through air and noise pollution in sensitive areas. Such impacts should be taken into account in the project selection criteria.

Main results and recommendations

Most of the programme priorities and areas of intervention will have positive or neutral impacts on the relevant environmental matters. Significant negative impacts on the environment can be prevented, as recommended in this SEA, during project selection by setting up criteria in line with the overall AIO programme objectives and its priorities.

Programme implementation should focus on key issues of long-term balanced development in a transnational context, such as reducing negative impacts of climate change, management of natural resource, sustainable transport systems and reduced emissions, in line with the general principle of 'sustainability' as defined in the OP.