

VII Adriatic and Ionian Council / EUSAIR Ministerial Meeting

Tirana Declaration

“EU-Youth-AIR cultural exchange”

16 May 2022

We, the Representatives of the Governments of Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Greece, Italy, Montenegro, North Macedonia, San Marino, Serbia and Slovenia, meeting in Tirana, with the participation of the **European Commission**, in the framework of the 7th Forum of the European Union Strategy for the Adriatic and Ionian Region (EUSAIR):

GUIDED by the Ancona Declaration of 20 May 2000 and its basic principles, as well as by the principles expressed by the consecutive Adriatic and Ionian Council (AIC) declarations and by the joint AIC/EUSAIR Ministerial Declarations;

RECALLING the Conclusions of the EU General Affairs Council (GAC) of 29 September 2014 and those of the European Council of 23-24 October 2014 which endorsed the EUSAIR, on the basis of the Commission’s Communication of 17 June 2014, the Addendum to the EUSAIR Communication {COM(2020) 132 final} adopted by the Commission on 2 April 2020, including North Macedonia in the EUSAIR and the Addendum to the EUSAIR Communication {COM(2022) 44 final} adopted by the Commission on 14 February 2022, including San Marino in the EUSAIR;

ACKNOWLEDGING the long term experience of cooperation among All Governments and **APPRECIATING** the valuable contribution brought by the EU Strategy for the Adriatic and Ionian Region (EUSAIR) in strengthening the regional cooperation dimension in key policy areas for the future of the region and their positive impact in leveraging support to reforms fostering sustainable socio-economic recovery and development and bringing the candidate countries and potential candidates closer to the Union’s values and standards;

ACKNOWLEDGING the reality of 2020, 2021 and 2022 marked by the COVID-19 pandemic and **RECOGNISING** that coordinated response and cooperation in the Adriatic Ionian Region is needed to ensure full socio-economic recovery and sustainable development;

BEARING IN MIND the importance of maintaining and strengthening international peace founded upon freedom, equality, justice, rule of law, fundamental rights, democracy, good governance and of good neighbourly relations and reconciliation;

* * *

1. **DEPLORE** in the strongest terms the illegal and unjustified aggression by the Russian Federation against Ukraine in violation of Article 2(4) of the UN Charter; **REAFFIRM ITS COMMITMENT** to the sovereignty, independence, unity and territorial integrity of Ukraine within its internationally recognized borders, extending to its territorial waters and unjustified aggression by the Russian Federation against Ukraine in violation of Article 2 (4) of the UN Charter; **EXPRESS GRAVE CONCERN** – already highlighted on February 28th in the AII/EUSAIR Trio meeting Declaration - at the deteriorating humanitarian situation in and around Ukraine, with an increasing number of internally displaced persons and refugees in need of humanitarian assistance and **APPRECIATE** the package of Cohesion Action for Refugees (CARE) that the European Commission has recently been made available for Member States, in order to help them to welcome Ukrainian refugees quickly and humanely; **WELCOME** the help and assistance of any kind provided to Ukraine and Ukrainian refugees on the bilateral ground;
2. Underline the all-inclusiveness priority of the AII/EUSAIR Albanian Presidency; **WELCOME** San Marino as the tenth participating country of the EUSAIR, officially joining on 14 February 2022; **RECOGNIZE** San Marino's full capacity as standing member of the Strategy and **ACKNOWLEDGE** its commitment to the EUSAIR Action Plan and its revision process;
3. **RECALL** that 2022 is the European Year of Youth, Tirana is the European Youth Capital for 2022 and that youth is a priority of the current EUSAIR/AII Albanian Presidency; in this regard **COMMEND** the Albanian Presidency for further supporting and promoting Young POPRI network and **ENCOURAGE** each of the future Chairmanships to continue to do so; **ACKNOWLEDGE** the need to empower youth as key driver of regional cooperation, reconciliation and peacebuilding; **EMPHASIZE** that the inclusion of young people in the decision making process requires an all-inclusive approach, encompassing all stakeholders of the AI region, including social and non-governmental actors, media and business community;
4. **ENHANCE** the synergies for championing the voice of young people with regard to European values and EU integration; **INCREASE** the close interplay of youth exchanges between Western Balkan AII/EUSAIR participating countries and EU AII/EUSAIR participating countries; **FOLLOW** a good practice approach and example of other EU Macroregional Strategies; **COMMIT** to continue the process of establishing an EUSAIR youth council;
5. **ACKNOWLEDGE** that the EU enlargement to the Western Balkans represents a geostrategic investment in a stable, strong, and united Europe; **RECOGNISE** the efforts made so far by the Western Balkans in their path toward the EU based on the merit-based accession process and conditionality; **ENCOURAGE** EU Member States to accelerate the EU path for the WB countries, notably by setting the date for the first IGCs with Albania and North Macedonia during the French Presidency of the Council of the EU and granting the candidate status to Bosnia and Herzegovina as soon as possible;

6. **WELCOME** the start of the process of revision of EUSAIR Action Plan to adapt the Strategy to respond better to current challenges and needs of the region, including the changes in its membership; **COMMIT** the EUSAIR Action Plan revision process to ensure that EU enlargement will be strengthened;
7. **RECOGNISE** climate change and environmental degradation as existential threats to Europe and the World and **PLEDGE** to scale up cooperation for a modern, resource-efficient and competitive Adriatic and Ionian Region and to concentrate efforts to meeting the objectives of the European Green Deal and EU Biodiversity Strategy 2030, including maritime spatial planning and integrated coastal management strategies, the new approach for a Sustainable Blue Economy and the Green Agenda for the Western Balkans in all EUSAIR countries;
8. **STEP UP** efforts aimed at increasing energy resilience of the EUSAIR region whilst taking into account decarbonisation goals and promoting clean and sustainable technologies;
9. **REAFFIRM** the objective to advance the enlargement process in the Western Balkans; **ACKNOWLEDGE** the role of the Adriatic Ionian Initiative and EUSAIR as powerful and democratic frameworks to foster stability, strengthen good-neighbourly relations and regional cooperation, and support the EU accession of candidate countries and potential candidates in the Adriatic and Ionian region through specific regional cooperation actions facilitating the uptake of the relevant sectorial EU acquis;
10. **CALL** on all relevant EUSAIR actors to strengthen their commitment on the embedding process and encourage them to plan and implement, where appropriate, the EUSAIR Flagship/strategic projects during the programming period 2021-2027 through all available funding sources, including Cohesion funds, IPA III, EU directly managed funds (Horizon Europe, LIFE, CEF, etc.), national funds, and to monitor and evaluate their impact; **WELCOME** the results already achieved and **ENCOURAGE** all relevant EUSAIR actors to strengthen, with the support of the EU Commission, networking of managing authorities of EU funding programmes and National IPA Coordinators, consistently with the Council of the European Union conclusions of 2 December 2020;
11. **CALL** on all EUSAIR countries to continue ensuring effective support to the governance of the EUSAIR through projects funded by the Interreg IPA ADRIION transnational programme, including the Facility Point, as a basis of a smooth and effective implementation of the Strategy;
12. **INVITE** EU Member States of the EUSAIR to make the best use of article 63 (4) of the Regulation 2021/1060 of 24 June 2021 allowing, when necessary and appropriate, all or part of operations under Cohesion funds to be implemented outside of a Member States, including outside the Union, for the implementation of EUSAIR relevant actions;

13. **EMPHASIZE** the role of National Parliaments as direct representatives of the peoples, and **RECOGNIZE** the importance of the 18th Conference of the Presidents/Speakers of AII Parliaments organized by the Albanian AII Presidency on May 6, focusing on the European Integration of the Western Balkans and on culture and tourism;
14. **REAFFIRM** the AII traditional connecting role between Governments, regional actors and civil society FORA and their networks as a very important factor in the implementation phase of the macro-regional mechanism **CONVINCED** that the subsidiarity principle is one of the key principles for success;
15. **CONFIRM** the role of the AII as the "political anchorage" to the EUSAIR and reflect on the complementary relation between them, **ENCOURAGE** the AII to be more vocal in pursuing political messages for a successful and timely EU enlargement process in the Western Balkans region;
16. **CONTINUE** the efforts to fine-tune AII activities and structures for contributing to the goals of the Strategy, among others by systematically cooperating with Thematic Steering Groups, providing them with the proposals and recommendations originating from key stakeholders, with particular reference to the activities carried out by the AII regional Fora of Cities, Chambers of Commerce and Universities of the region, and using the EUSAIR Stakeholders' Platform as a key tool for facilitating stakeholders' engagement;
17. **BUILD UP** on the best practices and lessons learned from previous Chairmanships and the positive outcome of the AII/EUSAIR Trio meeting; **SUGGESTS** to future Chairmanships in Office to consider giving continuity to the good experience of the AII/EUSAIR Trio meetings, as a possible additional constructive mechanism between the GB meetings;
18. **COMMEND** the AII Permanent Secretariat for granting coordination among participating countries in the framework of the AII activities and for its efforts aimed at maintaining efficient links with the Adriatic Ionian Fora of Cities, Chambers of Commerce, Universities, convinced that, through the AII Fora, civil society can provide added value to the EUSAIR delivering tangible and beneficial results;
19. **APPRECIATE** the contribution brought by the AII Fora of Chambers of Commerce, Cities, Universities in the organization of several events, as a step forward in bringing a wider group of stakeholders from various sectors to build and consolidate the relationship between civil society, local, regional, national and European Institutions;
20. **WELCOME** the results of the implementation of the Memorandum of Understanding between the CEI Executive Secretariat and the Adriatic Ionian Initiative Permanent Secretariat, which resulted in the second edition of the joint programme "IMAGINE" Active Young Citizens for Sustainable Development in CEI and AII areas, and **ENCOURAGE** the AII to develop further initiatives with the CEI and other regional organizations in the future;

21. **ACKNOWLEDGE** the importance of contacts among the Secretariats of regional organizations in order to further develop synergies and exchange experience, best practices and know-how;
22. **INVITE** EUSAIR key stakeholders to establish and/or strengthen links with other multilateral initiatives operating in the Adriatic and Ionian region in order to exploit each other's synergies and increase the impact of the EUSAIR action;
23. **CONGRATULATE** Albania for conducting a successful chairmanship over the EUSAIR and AII and, despite challenging times, successfully delivering numerous achievements as outlined in the Annexes to this declaration.
24. **THANK** Albania and the city of Tirana, the European Youth Capital 2022, for the excellent organization and hospitality offered on the occasion of the AIC/EUSAIR ministerial meeting and 7th EUSAIR Forum;
25. **ENTRUST** the incoming AII/EUSAIR Chairmanship from 1 June 2022 to 31 May 2023 to Bosnia-Herzegovina inviting it to use all instruments at its disposal with the aim of consolidating cooperation and leading the AII/EUSAIR Region into a period of sustainable growth and prosperity.

ANNEX I

Achievements of Albanian EUSAIR Chairmanship

- ❖ San Marino is officially included as the 10-th participating country of EUSAIR.
- ❖ Statement of AII-EUSAIR Trio on the Russian aggression against Ukraine.
- ❖ Launch of the revision of the EUSAIR Action Plan.
- ❖ Launch of EUSAIR Communication Academy programme for key EUSAIR stakeholders, governmental communicators and youth (EUSAIR Facility Point)
- ❖ Launching thorough discussion on a EUSAIR youth council.
- ❖ Continuation of youth engagement through POPRI initiative, a functioning network of technological parks that are offering knowledge support to educational institutions and mentors to train young (14-29-years-old) in entrepreneurial thinking. Final competition takes place during the Annual Forum and best one are to be awarded.
- ❖ First EUSAIR Flagship succeeded to raise funds on the international call (project Namris within the ASOSCop contingency plan in the event of accidents at sea flagship¹).
- ❖ EUSAIR Facility Point launched numerous events to support ongoing EUSAIR processes:
 - Workshop on EUSAIR investment in skills and education analysing the new blue education and training needs arising from the twin green and digital transitions in the Region, with the purpose of defining possible common paths on a macroregional scale, organised by Italian Facility Point partner on 9 July 2021;
 - Workshop on the Future of Europe - Youth at the Centre, event, focusing on active participation of youth within their societies and on the European level on Young Strategic Forum, Bled, co-organised by Facility Point Lead Partner on 31 August 2021;
 - Four EUSAIR Action Lab workshops on networking and complementarities for the embedding of the EUSAIR, online and onsite events, organised through 2021 and 2022 by Italian Facility Point Partner (16 July 2021, 1 October 2021, 19 November 2021, 7 April 2022);

¹ Co-financed within the call of EC Directorate-General for European Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid Operations (ECHO)

- Re-Routing Tourism aiming at sustainable green Macro-region – EUSAIR Stakeholders Conference, organised by Croatian Facility Point Partner on 25 November 2021, Rovinj and online;
 - National communication workshop in Montenegro, Facility Point Partner from Montenegro, 6 October 2021 and info days for students in March 2022;
 - National financial dialogues on embedding in MN, GR, SI and HR, definition of the terminology of the flagships/strategic projects/master plans;
 - Namris press conference, organised by Slovenian Facility Point project partner and TSG 3, online, 16 February 2022;
 - Active participation of EUSAIR key stakeholders at the 19th European Week of Regions, online, October 2021 and at the 3rd EU macro-regional strategies week, online, March 2022.
- ❖ Mediterranean Coast and Macro-regional Strategies Week 2021 organised in the partnership between Slovenia and North Macedonia:
- What can EUSAIR do to enable the Blue and Green sustainable growth in the Adriatic Ionian region: MSP in EUSAIR state of the art, joint workshop organised by TSG 3 and TSG 1, 9th November 2021, online;
 - Workshop: EUSAIR – How can we embed innovation potentials around Flagships? Organised by Facility Point Lead partner, online, 11 November 2021;
 - Benchmarking of innovation policies in EU macro-regions/sea basins – Validation workshop (open to public) – organised by Ljubljana Technological part, online, 11 November 2021;
 - 2nd Meeting of EUSAIR key implementers and Programming Authorities (MA/NIPAC), organised by North Macedonia, 22 November 2021;
 - Roundtable: Youth and protection of the environment, organised by North Macedonia, 22 November 2021;
 - Communication workshop for TSG 3 and Facility Point communication experts: Communication quantity for environmental quality in EUSAIR, Slovenian FP partner, online, 23 November 2021.
- ❖ GB and TSG meetings:
- 16th TSG 4 meeting, 5 October 2021, online
 - 16th Governing Board meeting, 18 and 19 October 2021, online
 - 15th TSG 3 meeting on 26th October 2021, online
 - 15th TSG 2 transport subgroup meeting, 17 November 2021, online
 - 14th TSG 2 energy subgroup meeting, 17 November 2021, online
 - 14th TSG 1 meeting, 7 December 2021, online
 - 17th Governing Board meeting, 2 and 3 March 2022 Tirana and online
 - 16th TSG 2 transport subgroup meeting, 18 March 2022, online
 - 16th TSG 3 meeting, 22 March 2022, online
 - 15th TSG 2 – subgroup Energy meeting, 26 April 2022, online

- 15th Pillar 1 TSG meeting, 3 May 2022, online
 - 17th Pillar 4 TSG meeting, 4 May 2022, online
- ❖ EUSAIR POPRI Youth, Tirana, 16-17 May 2022.
 - ❖ The list is not exhausted.

ANNEX II

Achievements of Albanian AII Chairmanship

- ❖ The AII Albanian Chairmanship organized numerous AII Round Tables:
 - Round Table on Inter-University Cooperation in the Adriatic Ionian Region “Higher Education challenges and responses in Covid-time: how university education has been reshaped in response to COVID-19 one year later”, organized by the AII Albanian Chairmanship in cooperation with UNIADRION and the AII Permanent Secretariat on November 30th 2021;
 - Round Table on Environmental Protection “National Parks in the Adriatic Ionian region as a driver of sustainable development”, organized by the AII Permanent Secretariat in cooperation with the Albanian Chairmanship and the former Slovenian Chairmanship, on March 29th 2022;
 - Round Table on Chambers of Commerce System within the Adriatic and Ionian Region, organized by the Forum AIC, Durres Chamber of Commerce in cooperation with the Permanent Secretariat to be held on May 18th 2022;
- ❖ The AII Trio plus Secretariat meeting took place on February 28th 2022 (online), along with the EUSAIR Trio Presidency meeting, as an innovative and constructive mechanism to assure the continuity and synergy of the AII and EUSAIR activities;
- ❖ The 2nd edition of the initiative “*IMAGINE - Active Young Citizens for Sustainable Development in CEI and AII areas*”, co-organized by the CEI and AII Secretariats, designed to stimulate the engagement of youth in the Central European Initiative and the Adriatic Ionian Initiative regions in order to raise awareness on the UN Agenda 2030 and its 17 Sustainable Development Goals.
- ❖ The AII Permanent Secretariat organized, under the Albanian Chairmanship, and within the framework of the Adriatic Mediterranean Festival, 18-22 August 2021 in Ancona, three conferences/seminars to celebrate the 30th anniversary of the exodus of the Albanians to Italy:
 - A public meeting with Prof. Romozzo della Rocca, the Italian maximum expert on Albanian history;

- A round table on the Albanian presence in Italy after 1991, from the first steps to rooting, to return emigration;
 - A seminar on Albania and the European integration. Where do we stand?
-
- ❖ The 10 two-year scholarships granted to students coming from the Adriatic-Ionian region and the Western Balkans for the enrolment in one of the five master's degree courses taught in English at the Marche Polytechnic University for the academic year 2022/23, financed by the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation.

 - ❖ The AII Internships Programme, named Western Balkanship, organized by the Permanent Secretariat in cooperation with the Forum of the Adriatic and Ionian Chambers of Commerce and UniAdrion, financed by the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation, with the aim of covering 50 scholarships. The programme intends to involve students from universities in the Adriatic-Ionian region and companies, promoting student mobility in the Adriatic-Ionian Region and supporting the circulation of ideas and skills, involving universities and companies.