



REPUBLIC OF CROATIA  
Ministry of Foreign  
and European Affairs

MINISTRY OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS  
OF CROATIA



AII CHAIRMANSHIP OF  
CROATIA  
JUNE 2023 – MAY 2024

## MEETING OF THE COMMITTEE OF SENIOR OFFICIALS OF THE ADRIATIC AND IONIAN INITIATIVE

21 February 2024

ZAGREB

### FINAL MINUTES

The second meeting of the Committee of Senior Officials under the All Chairmanship of Croatia was held in Zagreb (and via Video Conference) on 21 February 2024. The CSO was chaired by the representative of the Croatian Chairmanship, Mr. **Sanjin Vlastelica**, Head of Department for European Macro-regions and EUSAIR National Coordinator, Ministry of Foreign and European Affairs of the Republic of Croatia, with the assistance of the Head of the All Permanent Secretariat, **Amb. Fabio Pigliapoco**.

Before kicking off the works of the CSO, Mr. **Sanjin Vlastelica** welcomed the participants and thanked the Permanent Secretariat for the support. **Ambassador Pigliapoco** took the floor to extend a warm welcome to all Senior Officials, stressing the excellent work done by the Croatian Chairmanship, as demonstrated by the many high-level events organized so far. Amb. Pigliapoco thanked Ms. Lidija Pansegrau Hadrović (who couldn't attend), All Senior Official, for the proactive and fruitful Presidency they are bringing forward. He further underlined the connecting role of the Permanent Secretariat between Governments, regional actors and civil society Fora and networks, feeding the Strategy with a bottom-up approach, essential for its success, as repeatedly invoked by the EU Commission since the establishment of the EUSAIR Strategy.

#### **1. Adoption of the Agenda**

Mr. **Vlastelica** took note that the Agenda of the meeting was acceptable to all participants with no exception.

#### **2. Implementation of the All Croatian Chairmanship**

The **Chair** gave the floor to the Head of the All Permanent Secretariat to report on the activities and events conducted during the Chairmanship.

**Amb. Pigliapoco** summarized the key priorities of the Croatian Chairmanship, touching upon the events organized so far in cooperation with the Permanent Secretariat.

The Adriatic-Ionian Initiative Round Table on Development of Green Tourism Products and Balanced Tourism Development took place in Zagreb on the 25<sup>th</sup> of October 2023 organized in cooperation with the Thematic Steering Group (TSG) 4 on Sustainable Tourism and the Ministry of Tourism and Sport of the Republic of Croatia. The meeting was a successful event, which saw the participation of 10 qualified experts and more than 50 participants and stakeholders. Experts and participants presented and discuss the new strategies and action plans introduced by All/EUSAIR participating countries, emphasizing the importance of balancing between periods of high and low tourism season and the number of tourists and local residents, renovating old buildings for tourism purpose and on the creation of green tourism products. Amb. Pigliapoco highlighted how this Round Table organized in cooperation with the TSG represented an excellent example of the cooperation between the All and EUSAIR.

The Conference named “THE ADRIATIC-IONIAN REGION IS YOU(TH)!” took place on 15-16 November 2023 in Split, within the framework of the All/EUSAIR Croatian Chairmanship. The conference organized by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Croatia with the support of the All Permanent Secretariat and the Split University gave the opportunity to connect young people and the leading youth organizations of the Adriatic-Ionian region between themselves and also with the members of chambers of commerce, municipal authorities, universities and others stakeholders. At the conference, youth organizations, initiatives, and interesting projects were presented, confirming that young people are interested, active and eager for knowledge.

During the event several panels were organized. Specifically, Amb. Pigliapoco recalled the panel “Spotlight on Youth: the making of a business in the Adriatic and Ionian Region” organized by the Forum of the Chambers of Commerce. The event showcased the experiences of young entrepreneurs, leaders in their sectors, aiming to provide an interregional perspective on the challenge of the “Brain Drain” phenomenon.

Within the general framework of the Conference, the Round Table on "Quo vadis UniAdrion? The direction of inter-university cooperation" took place on November 15 at the University of Split, which holds the annual Chairmanship of the association, organized by UniAdrion in cooperation with the Permanent Secretariat. Participants further reinforced their commitment in developing the quality of higher education, fostering academic excellence and cultural understanding across borders.

**Amb. Pigliapoco** also informed Senior Officials that the All Permanent Secretariat took part in several other meetings and conferences, disseminating information and raising awareness among stakeholders on the All/EUSAIR, on its meaning and on the benefit it may bring. Among them: the 13<sup>th</sup> Congress on Women’s Entrepreneurship of the Adriatic & Ionian Area (October

10, 2023, Budva) organized by the Forum of the Adriatic Ionian Chambers of Commerce and hosted by Montenegro Chamber of Economy; the Final Conference of AI-NURECC PLUS (30 November 2023, Brussels); the conference for the 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the UN Universal Declaration of Human Rights, organized by the Marche Region in collaboration with the Marche Polytechnic University and the International Diplomatic Institute on the 11<sup>th</sup> of December. A day of reflection that opened a dialogue between institutions and young people, with over 300 students from middle and high schools.

### **3. Calendar of All upcoming activities**

While presenting the calendar of the upcoming events, **Mr. Vlastelica** informed that:

- The conference on “Fisheries in the contexts of the EU Biodiversity strategy for 2030” will take place on April 23<sup>rd</sup> in Zadar;
- The Conference on Transport Connectivity in the Adriatic Ionian Region with a focus on the Western Balkans-Eastern Mediterranean corridor, part of the new TEN-T regulation, will take place on the 25<sup>th</sup> of April in Zagreb;
- The EUSAIR Annual Forum will take place officially on the 15-16 of May in Šibenik, with some side-events which could potentially take place also on the 14 and 17 of May. A draft set-up of the Annual Forum is distributed to all Senior Officials.

The **Chair** further informed participants that the Adriatic Ionian Council / EUSAIR Ministerial Meeting will take place on May 15 from 9.00 a.m. to 10.15 a.m. (closed session), followed by the High-level panel open to all participants of the Forum, dedicated to the topic of the 2027+ Cohesion Policy, followed by media opportunity and the Chairmanship handover to Greece. The Ministerial official dinner will take place on the evening of the 14<sup>th</sup>.

The **Chair** stressed the importance to have the highest political level part of the Ministerial meeting and high-level panel. He further informed participants that invitation letters, co-signed by the Minister of Foreign and European Affairs and by the Minister of Regional Development and EU funds, will be sent out very soon.

Within the general framework of the EUSAIR Forum, the **Chair** informed Senior Officials that on May 14 a Conference organized in cooperation with the Committee of the Regions on the future of Cohesion Policy will take place, to which the Presidency plan to invite all the regional heads of governments of the EUSAIR participating countries.

As far as the annual Forum, the usual set up will be followed: some panels will be devoted to the Pillars; some on public administration and digitalization and some slots for the events are already reserved to the Fora of Civil Society, considering their growing important role within the Strategy. B2B meetings will also take place, organized with the assistance of DG GROW and the European Enterprise Network. Youth will also be one of the main focus of the Forum, with some events dealing with this topic.

**Italy** took the floor to ask the Chairmanship the topic of the Ministerial meeting. The Chair informed that the topic is not yet decided but it will be communicated soon.

**Serbia** took the floor to ask whether there are any updates on the Conference of the All Speakers/Presidents of the Parliaments. At the moment, there are no positive response from Parliaments but the Presidency is still willing to organize it and will do its best to sensitize capitals.

#### **4. Adriatic and Ionian Council / Preparation of the annual Declaration**

The **Chair** gave the floor to Amb. Pigliapoco.

**Amb. Pigliapoco** remarked that the All Permanent Secretariat will give its contribution in the drafting phase of the Šibenik Declaration. The Declaration will follow the same approach used during the past Chairmanships – a Declaration, balanced between the All and EUSAIR part, including some annexes in order to list and explain everything done throughout the year.

He further assured participants that the All-PS will cooperate closely with the Chairmanship-in-office and the EU Commission, DG REGIO in order to realize the double hat All/EUSAIR declaration. As it was done in the past, the All will circulate a first consolidated version to Senior Officials and National Coordinators by the end of March, leaving more than three weeks for comments and proposals of modifications. After receiving feedbacks, the All PS will merge them together taking into account every comment and national stance in order to have a final version by the beginning of May, trying to avoid any last-minute meeting.

#### **5. Report on the 17<sup>th</sup> Coordination Meeting of Regional Organizations (Ancona, 5 December 2023)**

The **Chair** gave the floor to Amb. Pigliapoco in order to be updated on the outcomes of the meeting.

**Amb. Pigliapoco** informed Senior Officials that the 17<sup>th</sup> Coordination Meeting of Regional Organizations took place in Ancona, Italy, on 5 December 2023, hosted by the Adriatic and Ionian Initiative Permanent Secretariat. He also recalled that Ministers of All/EUSAIR Participating Countries repeatedly asked the Permanent Secretariat to be in close contact and cooperation with the Secretariats of the other regional organizations, as also stated in the last Sarajevo Declaration.

The Meeting was attended by the Black Sea Economic Cooperation (BSEC), the Central European Initiative (CEI) and the Regional Cooperation Council (RCC). Special guests were the Fora of Civil Society: the Forum of the Adriatic and Ionian Chambers of Commerce, the Forum of Adriatic and Ionian Cities and UniAdrion, the network of the Adriatic Ionian Universities.

The overall objective of the meeting was to exchange views and information on the activities carried out by each of these organizations as well as to discuss possibilities and modalities to further enhance synergies, interaction and coordination in areas of common interest. The satisfactory meeting represented also an opportunity to point out a specificity of our Strategy, which connects people with the governmental level. The next edition of the Coordination meeting will be host by the Central European Initiative in Trieste in 2024.

After the Meeting, a Letter of Intent for further strengthening the cooperation between the BSEC PERMIS and All Permanent Secretariat was signed with the BSEC Secretary General Ambassador Lazar Comanescu. Aim of letter is to share expertise on relevant projects and topics; to exchange information on the relevant events organized by each organization; to consider organizing joint projects and to contribute to the visibility of each other's through their respective media channels.

**6. Report on the All Scholarships for international students at the Marche Polytechnic University;**

**Amb. Pigliapoco** briefly informed participants that the Adriatic Ionian Initiative Permanent Secretariat was able to successfully assign all the 10 two-year scholarships to students coming from the All/EUSAIR participating countries for the enrolment in one of the Master's Courses taught in English at Marche Polytechnic University.

**7. Report on the internships programme organized in cooperation with the Forum of the Adriatic Ionian Chambers of Commerce and UniAdrion (purpose: information)**

**Amb. Pigliapoco** brought to the attention of Senior Officials the All internship programme, named Western Balkanship, organized in cooperation with the Forum of the Adriatic and Ionian Chambers of Commerce and UniAdrion and with the financial help of the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation, which aims to cover about 50 scholarships along the lines of the ERASMUS + model. It intends to involve students from universities in the Adriatic-Ionian region, promoting student mobility in the Adriatic-Ionian Region and supporting the circulation of ideas and skills, giving students the opportunity to spend 3 to 6 months in companies and enterprises of the Adriatic Ionian area.

Amb. Pigliapoco informed participants that after an initial phase of mapping, data analysis, contacts with companies in the EUSAIR Region and communication campaigns, since September the implementing partners have provided constant support to students interested in the project through the UniAdrion university network. To date, 4 students have already begun their internships.

The two Fora are continuing with a massive communication, trying to reach individual universities, students via social media, via the ESN network, and organizing various

informative webinars. They will continue to carry out a targeted information and promotion campaign to reach as many students as possible.

**Italy** took the floor to support the ambitious programme. She further recalled the difficulties found during the first phase of the project, therefore inviting senior officials to disseminate this opportunity.

#### **8. Any Other Business**

No other business was brought to the attention of participants.