



BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA
MINISTRY OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS



ADRIATIC AND IONIAN INITIATIVE
CHAIRMANSHIP OF BiH

XVIII Meeting of the Adriatic and Ionian Council

Brussels Declaration

13 May 2015

Brussels

We, the Members of the Adriatic Ionian Council (AIC), representatives of the Governments of Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Greece, Italy, Montenegro, Serbia and Slovenia,

GUIDED by the Ancona Declaration of May 20, 2000 and its basic principles, as well as by the principles expressed by the consecutive AIC declarations from 2001 to 2014;

CONFIRMING that the European Union values are the basic principles of cooperation within the Adriatic and Ionian Initiative;

RECALLING that, since the last Adriatic Ionian Council of May 13, 2014, regional cooperation in the Adriatic and Ionian region has undergone a substantial process of evolution, marked by the endorsement of the "EU Strategy for the Adriatic and Ionian Region" (EUSAIR) by the EU Council on 24th October 2014;

CONVINCED that the EU Strategy for the Adriatic and Ionian Region (EUSAIR), together with the intergovernmental activities carried out by the Adriatic and Ionian Initiative (AII), will give further impetus to cooperation, growth and investment as well as to peace and security in the entire Region;

AWARE that meeting the requirements of the Enlargement Policy and the Stabilization and Association Process, stability and growth will further pave the way to the EU integration of the Candidate and Potential Candidate Countries in the Region;

* * *

- **VOICE THEIR GRATIFICATION** for the progress made by the AII Participating Countries, in cooperation with the EU Commission, in the process of preparation and endorsement of the EUSAIR, so fulfilling the request by the European Council of 13/14 December 2012 to present "a new EU Strategy for the Adriatic and Ionian region before the end of 2014";

- **EXPRESS** sincere thanks to the European Commission for its convinced support during all preparatory phases of the EUSAIR and for its commitment to continue working side-by-side with the AII Participating Countries during the implementation phase;
- **REITERATE** their conviction that AII serves as a platform of cooperation encouraging the endeavors of participating candidate and potential candidate countries towards full-fledged EU membership.
- **COMMEND** the enhanced regional cooperation as well as interaction between EU and the WB6 by promoting further inclusiveness and openness conducive to full integration .
- **NOTE WITH SATISFACTION** that, since the last Adriatic and Ionian Council, some important “milestones” - which brought to the endorsement , launch and swift beginning of implementation of the EUSAIR - have been already achieved as follows:
 - EU Commission “Communication concerning the European Union Strategy for the Adriatic and Ionian Region” and its “Action Plan” (17 June 2014);
 - General Affairs Council conclusions on the European Union Strategy for the Adriatic and Ionian Region (Brussels, 29 September 2014);
 - European Council Endorsement of the EUSAIR, (Brussels, 23-24 October 2014);
 - Launch of the Strategy (Brussels, 18 November 2014);
 - First Governing Board marking the beginning of the implementation phase (Ancona, 22-23 January 2015) followed by kick off of all 4 Thematic Steering Groups;
- **AKNOWLEDGE** the validity of the principle of multilevel governance of the macro regional strategy outlined in the Commission Report of 20 May 2014 and **COMMIT TO ASSURE** the necessary political leadership and regional ownership, also through AICs meetings, so confirming the character of “ intergovernmental anchorage “ of the Strategy , assumed over the years by the Adriatic and Ionian Initiative;
- **APPRECIATE** the valuable work carried out by National Coordinators and welcome their decision to assign the co-Chairmanship of the Governing Board to the Commission and to the rotating Chairmanship of the AII, the latter supported by the AII Permanent Secretariat, and fully share the choice of its membership;
- **PRAISE** Foreign and Sectorial Ministries of EU and non-EU Countries for their efforts and effective involvement to ensure that the initial step of the implementation phase could start – as it was the case - as soon as possible with the first meeting of the Governing Board held on January 2015 and followed by Thematic Steering Groups meetings in March and April 2015;
- **EMPHASIZE** the need for the Participating Countries and their Administrations in charge of coordinating the EUSAIR to ensure a strategic

national coordination within their own governments; to effectively cooperate with sectorial ministries; to actively involve stakeholders from the Region including parliaments, Regional Governments and civil society; to make the best use of the Transnational Cooperation Programs and particularly of the ADRION program ;

- **ACKNOWLEDGE** the importance of contacts among the Secretariats of Regional Organizations and Initiatives active in our region, aiming at strengthening inclusive dialogue and cooperation, in order to exchange information on activities and best practices and explore possible ground of cooperation in projects of importance for the Adriatic- Ionian Region; **ENCOURAGE** also the cooperation with other Macro-Regional Strategies in particular through the lessons learned by their implementation;
- **ENCOURAGE** the Permanent Secretariat to deepen the already existing close cooperation with the Adriatic and Ionian Fora of civil societies in the framework of the “Integrated Secretariat” , convinced that the role of civil society – precious in the phase of preparation of the Strategy - needs to be maintained and , if possible , reinforced during the implementation phase of EUSAIR;
- **RECALL** – as it has been recognized in the EU Commission Communication of June 2014 – that the experience of more than a decade of the AII intergovernmental cooperation has benefited the Strategy and that this successful cooperation has already created many useful links between Participating Countries and spin-off regional cooperation between Cities, Chambers of Commerce and Universities;
- **ENDORSE** the decision made by the AII Committee of Senior Officials to overhaul AII Round Tables, transforming them into an auxiliary tool at the disposal of the EUSAIR Thematic Steering Groups , and **INVITE** TSGs to make the best use of this instrument;
- **COMMEND** Bosnia and Herzegovina for its efforts in enhancing intergovernmental cooperation among AII Participating States during the period of its Chairmanship, through the organization of meetings and Round Tables on different fields of cooperation (SMEs, Tourism, Flood Relief and Inter-University Cooperation) *ad interim* ensuring coherence between AII’s activities and the preparation of the EUSAIR;
- **WELCOME** the Meeting of the Speakers of Parliaments of the AII chaired by Mr. Šefik Džaferović and Mr. Bariša Čolak, which took place in Neum on April 23rd and **TAKE NOTE** of the Joint Statement adopted at the end of the Meeting which looks forwards to a wider involvement of Parliaments in AII and EUSAIR activities;
- **REGISTER** with satisfaction the approval by the CSO of the Annual Report of activities of the Permanent Secretariat of the AII;

- **INVITE** the incoming AII Presidencies and EUSAIR co-Presidencies to further enhance the interlinks between the AII Council and EUSAIR, fully recognizing the AII's role of intergovernmental anchorage of the European Strategy for Adriatic and Ionian Region.
- **THANK** Bosnia and Herzegovina for its valuable contribution to the Initiative throughout the period of its Chairmanship and for co-organizing with the EU Commission the first EUSAIR Governing Board in cooperation with the AII Permanent Secretariat, and for the admirable organization of the XVIII Adriatic Ionian Council in Brussels.
- **ENTRUST** Croatia for the incoming AII Chairmanship from June 1, 2015 to May 31, 2016, wishing her success in a period of crucial importance for the AII and EUSAIR, that is the implementation of the Strategy.