



## **17<sup>th</sup> Conference of the Presidents/Speakers of Parliaments of the Adriatic and Ionian Initiative**

**Ljubljana, 15 April 2021**

### **JOINT STATEMENT**

The 17<sup>th</sup> Conference of the Presidents/Speakers of Parliaments of the Adriatic and Ionian Initiative took place on 15 April 2021 under Slovenia's Chairmanship of the Adriatic and Ionian Initiative (AI) and of the EU Strategy for the Adriatic and Ionian Region (EUSAIR). In view of the importance of parliamentary support to the AI/EUSAIR, which is particularly essential in an emergency situation, and the orientations mirrored in parliamentary debates, in the setting of the Covid-19 pandemic the conference was held as a virtual event.

The Conference was chaired by the President of the National Assembly of the Republic of Slovenia Mr Igor Zorčič and was attended by the delegations of Albania, Bosnia and Hercegovina, Croatia, Greece, Italy, North Macedonia, Montenegro, San Marino, Serbia and Slovenia.

Reaffirming the principles stemming from the Ancona Declaration as the founding political document of the Adriatic and Ionian Initiative and taking into account the conclusions and orientations of hitherto conferences of Presidents/Speakers of Parliaments of the Adriatic and Ionian Initiative, **the participants:**

- stress the interdependence and interconnection between the countries of the Adriatic and Ionian region that share common values, strong historical and cultural ties, and geographical area;
- underline the firm political support of parliaments for the EU Strategy for the Adriatic and Ionian Region, which provides a framework for comprehensive, concerted and inclusive action in addressing common challenges and achieving the key EU priorities in the region;
- highlight the importance of regional cooperation and the commitment to support further processes of European integration of the countries of the Adriatic and Ionian Initiative, which contributes to strengthening peace, security and stability and to creating better conditions for a comprehensive and more balanced progress and development of the region;
- highlight the importance of the continuation of EU enlargement process driven by objective criteria and welcome the European Union's formal decision of 25 March 2020 to start accession talks with North Macedonia and Albania, while

expecting that also the negotiating frameworks for both countries, members of the All, will be adopted without further delay, which will allow for the convening of intergovernmental conferences and for the actual launch of negotiations;

- recognise that, in the unparalleled conditions of the Covid-19 pandemic, mutual assistance and solidarity are of the utmost importance, whereby an accelerated process of digital and green transformation can contribute to a more favourable way out of the current health, social and economic crisis;
- understand that the current period is particularly difficult for young people, who are severely affected by various measures such as lockdown and distance learning and who are among the most vulnerable groups in the labour market;
- recognise the importance of digital technologies in the transformation of the economy and society and in creating jobs, advancing education and new skills, enhancing competitiveness and innovation, promoting the common good and fostering better inclusion of citizens.

***The participants of the conference:***

- expressed satisfaction with the successful development of cooperation between the All parliamentary and governmental dimensions and the Fora of Civil Society (Chambers of Commerce, Cities and Universities), and the wish to further strengthen networking among various stakeholders in the region;
- stressed the role of the All/EUSAIR in a sustainable and green recovery after the Covid-19 pandemic and the expectation that EUSAIR priorities will be successfully embedded into the new programmes of the European Cohesion Policy 2021-2027 and IPA programming documents;
- stressed that the agreed priorities of the macro-regional strategies match considerably with those of the EU Economic and Investment Plan in the Western Balkans, which accelerates the integration of the region with the European Union and promotes overall economic progress, job creation, and the digital transformation of the region;
- expressed their determination to raise awareness of the importance of sustainable, secure and human centred digital transformation, which will support the transition to a green economy in line with the European Green Deal and the Green Agenda for the Western Balkans;
- acknowledged the essential role played by digital technologies, such as very high capacity broadband networks, blockchain, artificial intelligence and high performance computing, in applying Covid-19 related measures, particularly in the areas of remote work, distance learning and research;
- noted that digital knowledge and skills are of paramount importance for the jobs of the future and that, in parallel with systematic lifelong learning and development of digital competences, it is necessary to promote the cognitive, social and emotional skills of each individual;

- stressed the importance of the ongoing adaptation of educational institutions to the changing demands of the economy, which contributes to greater employment opportunities for the young and slows down brain drain and labour migration from the region;
- underlined that the AII provides an opportunity to connect young people and a platform for the transfer of knowledge and promotion of innovation and entrepreneurial ideas;
- noted that the processes of digitalisation should not lead to a deepening of social disparities, an increase in precarious forms of work and increased workload, but must be directed in such a way as to lead to a human centred society and promote democratic processes and active citizenship;
- expressed satisfaction that several countries in the region recognise the added value of participation in the AII/EUSAIR, which is reflected also in the recent accession of new member states;
- expressed a sincere welcome to the delegation of San Marino, which attended the Conference of Presidents/Speakers of the Adriatic and Ionian Initiatives for the first time;
- thanked the National Assembly of the Republic of Slovenia for organising the virtual conference and wished every success to the Republic of Albania for its upcoming Chairmanship of the AII/EUSAIR between 1 June 2021 and 31 May 2022.