

EU-BALKAN YOUTH FORUM
“EU enlargement, national and international policies”
Roma, 25 November 2021

1) L’iniziativa sembra quasi una di quelle cooperazioni interne all’UE tra regioni gemellate, ma in questo caso integra Paesi non-UE. Qual è la specializzazione che l’Iniziativa Adriatico Ionica può portare al dialogo per l’integrazione?

- The All continues to have its own **power of attraction** after more than twenty years after its creation. Only a few years ago, in 2018, the Adriatic-Ionian Council (gathering Foreign Ministers of the All) welcomed the Republic of **North Macedonia** as its ninth member, while in 2019 the Republic of **San Marino** became the tenth country to join the Initiative.
- Since the endorsement of the EUSAIR, the All have strived to **align the intergovernmental instrument with the new EU Strategy** in order to avoid duplication and to foster coherence between the two initiatives. In this regard, the All has assumed the new role of “**Advocate of Civil Society Organizations**” within the macroregional process, particularly by opening our Roundtables to the participation of different stakeholders and the civil society as well as by coordinating and cooperating with the three civil society Fora based in Ancona (Cities, Chambers, Universities).
- The All had the idea **to bridge the so-called Civil Society** - the Adriatic-Ionian networks and Fora, such as the Forum of the Adriatic and Ionian Chambers of Commerce, the Forum of the Adriatic and Ionian Cities and UniAdriion (the Adriatic Ionian University network) - **with the EUSAIR Strategy**, so as to be able to channel the needs and requests but also

ideas and proposals of the Civil Society within this complex mechanism, with a bottom-up approach.

- In addition to the four pillars common to the EUSAIR Strategy, **in recent years the Initiative has worked on further issues** such as the youth dossier, inter-university cooperation, female entrepreneurship and equal opportunities, anti-corruption and circular economy, topics which are key to close the negotiation chapters for a future accession to the European Union.
- The Initiative is also characterized by a **parliamentary dimension**. Just recently, on April 15, 2021, the 17th Conference of the Presidents/Speakers of the Parliaments of the All was hosted (virtually) in Ljubljana, focusing mainly on the digital transition and opportunities for younger generations.
- As far as the Youth dossier, we have tried to tackle this issue from different angles and perspectives, developing concrete opportunities for young people and students.
- In this regard, let me recall the 10 two-year scholarships which will be soon granted to students coming from the Adriatic-Ionian region and the Western Balkans for the enrolment in one of the four master's degree courses taught in English at the Marche Polytechnic University and the university course on issues relating to European integration and the economic-political development of the countries involved in the All and EUSAIR Strategy.
- Let me also mention the 2nd edition of the Call IMAGINE – Active Young Citizens for Sustainable Development - realized in cooperation with the Central European Initiative and with the valuable financial support of the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation.

- The intention is to encourage high school students to deepen their knowledge and raise awareness of the activities promoted by the United Nations as part of the 2030 Agenda and its 17 Sustainable Development Goals.
- Lastly, I invite all of you to participate to the upcoming Round Table on Inter-University Cooperation under Albanian Chairmanship which will be held online on November 30th named “Higher Education challenges and responses in Covid-time: how university education has been reshaped in response to COVID-19”.
- **All shows a high degree of complementarity with the EUSAIR**, adding a more cultural and social dimension to the economic one which is the key feature of the latter. The overall result is a comprehensive set of strategies aimed at fostering integration in the region and at bringing it increasingly closer to the European Union.

2) L’Adriatico è un mondo che ha subito molto il fascino di una cultura comune, quella veneziana e dove oggi crescono di nuovo ulteriori identità miste. C’è l’Adriatico di Venezia e quello dell’Albania, quello della Dalmazia e quello dell’Italia, del nord e del sud. C’è una prospettiva per una ulteriore evoluzione culturale o siamo in preda alla globalizzazione ed al marketing delle singole regioni? C’è qualcosa da imparare per il resto dell’Europa e dei Balcani?

- The EUSAIR Strategy and the Adriatic-Ionian Initiative are further tools to promote the development of the Western Balkan area, which aims **to enhance diversity by harmonizing them in an overall framework**.
- The potential for a common macro-regional branding has been identified. **The EUSAIR Action Plan has suggested a brand-building strategy**, targeting common niches, fostering digitalisation, mapping

and promoting macro-regional routes, upgrading and integrating tourism products from thematic sectors (rural, cultural, food, health) at a macro-regional level.

- A coordinated macro-regional effort to promote tourism calls for a branding strategy that presents **the whole Adriatic-Ionian region as a single destination**. This, in turn, could foster intra-regional cooperation, which is an essential factor in the Western Balkans enlargement process, and contribute to the development of a macro-regional identity.
- The **presence of a number of transboundary cultural and natural heritage sites**, as well as multiple common references in art, skills, traditions, architecture and gastronomy, offers great opportunities to strengthen the framing and perception of the Adriatic-Ionian region as a unitary and unique territory. Encouraging products and packages in tourism, cultural, and creative domains with a macroregional dimension may have an impact on its competitiveness. Increasing the recognisability and visibility of the macro-region for the external audience might also encourage a better integration between coastal and inland regions.
- Concretely, the intergovernmental activity has already given rise to some forms of identification of the Adriatic-Ionian basin - an example above all the **ADRION brand** adopted by the Chambers of Commerce and officially recognised as a *“best practice”* by the European Commission. These brands and tools enrich the path of integration and enlargement to countries that are geographically part of the European continent.
- So, the ongoing initiatives clearly show that there is a **common will to brand the region as “unique”**, rather than a fragmented combination of

countries competing with each other. There are historical and cultural **common roots that can be traced back to the Roman empire (which allowed the creation of a wide region with shared features that are present even today) and continued thanks to the Venetian legacy.** Not a story of domination, but rather the creation of a single space where different cultures were able to meet and blend with each other.

- The countries of the Western Balkans region share a recent history characterised by violent conflicts. **Thanks to reciprocal dialogue, and also to the strong attraction and influence played by the EU, they are now searching for their way forward,** which will hopefully culminate in their full accession into the “European family”. Just like Venice in the past, today the so-called “Brussels effect” can act as a pull factor to enlarge the EU space, based on democratic and solidarity values.
- **Money is not enough to create and strengthen a true “European spirit”.** Therefore, to support a swift and early achievement of this goal, I would like to commend the contribution of the All as a springboard for cultural and social exchanges, and I hope that these exchanges increasingly involve the young generations.