



## Inter-parliamentary Workshop

### “WESTERN BALKANS: BETWEEN MULTIPOLARISM AND THE EUROPEAN INTEGRATION PROCESS”

*Monday 26 April 2021, h14 – 17 via videoconference*

- Mister Chairman, Minister, Presidents, Excellencies, participants,
- I would like to thank **President/Chairman Fassino** and the Committee on Foreign and EU Affairs of the Italian Chamber of Deputies for the organization of this event and for the enriching and inspiring discussion which is taking place so far.
- It is a great pleasure to be here and to share the longstanding regional cooperation experience of the Adriatic and Ionian Initiative in the Western Balkans Region. For more than 20 year of its existence, this Initiative - born in 2000 by the proposal of Italian Prime Minister **Amato** and Minister of Foreign Affairs **Dini** and with the strong support of the former President of the EU Commission, Romano **Prodi** - has significantly contributed to building trust, intensifying cooperation, **integrating and adopting European values and standards**.
- Unfortunately, due to the outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic, we were forced to postpone the **20<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Celebrations**, which will take place in **Ancona** once the emergency situation is over. The Celebrations will give us an opportunity to exchange views on current affairs and issues of common concerns and to take stock of our achievements over the past twenty years, aimed at strengthening the AII as a regional forum committed to supporting European integration and sustainable development in the region.
- The Adriatic and Ionian Initiative and the EU Strategy for the Adriatic and Ionian Region (EUSAIR) play a special role as Regional Organizations in the process of the **European integration** of its non-EU Member States as well as in promoting the sustainable development and economic growth of all its Participating Countries through concrete cooperation activities, starting with a process of bottom-up involvement of representatives of Civil Society (Municipalities, Universities, Chambers of Commerce), essential for each Macroregional Strategy.
- From June 2020, the Chairmanship of the AII/EUSAIR has been held by the **Republic of Slovenia** which brought forward an excellent Presidency with a particular focus on

green connectivity, tourism and culture, youth issues, digitalization, equal opportunities and women's entrepreneurship.

- The **17° Conference of Presidents/Speakers of All Parliaments** took place two weeks ago on the April 15<sup>th</sup> with a specific focus on the development of digital society and employment opportunities for younger generation. The **Joint Statement** adopted by the All Parliaments Speakers further recognized the importance of the EU integration and enlargement process of the countries of the Adriatic and Ionian Initiative, as a key driver for strengthening peace, security and stability in the area.
- The **Parliamentary Dimension** is indeed a fundamental asset for the Adriatic and Ionian Initiative.
- A **strict cooperation among Parliaments** gives indeed added value in the effort to upgrade regional cooperation and to make the All and the EUSAIR instruments to get South Eastern Europe and the Western Balkans **again at the heart of European policy**, where they deserve to be.
- I am convinced that with synchronised actions, we can create a prosperous region, attractive for investments and opportunities that will provide economic and social growth and support the integration of the Western Balkans into the European Union.
- National Parliaments can play a decisive role in facilitating the implementation of the EUSAIR Strategy. You are the **closest link to citizens and to the electoral body** - the real targets and beneficiaries of every regional cooperation action in line with the **subsidiarity principle**, which is at the base of the EUSAIR, making sure that the benefits become a reality.
- Being the All-PS both an intergovernmental organization and a full member of the EUSAIR Governing Board, the All Permanent Secretariat is in a privileged position **to support the role of the Parliaments within the framework of the EUSAIR.**
- Putting aside the tangible outcomes that the EUSAIR is producing, let me say that this new form of cooperation, together with the traditional intergovernmental cooperation in this area – taking place in the framework of the All - **is crucial in bringing the two shores of the sea closer to each other, both in terms of institutions and people.**
- I would like to **acknowledge all the help and assistance provided during the pandemic** by the countries participating in the All/EUSAIR and by the EU Commission not only to each other, but also to their neighbours and towards the EU. This **spirit of**

**a true and authentic European solidarity** deserves public praise, and it is a striking example of the solidarity and mutual support the EU is built on!

- Therefore, it is **now time to create momentum and to leverage on this opportunity** to further step up the integration process. **The future of the Western Balkans is firmly in Europe.** These countries still demand for a full and comprehensive integration within the European Union.
- In a few weeks, the sixth **EUSAIR Forum will take place in Izola (11-12 May, online)** together with the **Adriatic and Ionian Council** (All highest-level body gathering ten Ministers of Foreign Affairs). The Council will give us the opportunity to adopt the Izola Declaration and raise awareness of common history and values, reinforcing a sense of belonging to a common European space.
- In this regard I would like to congratulate Slovenia on a successful, dynamic and proactive Presidency. The **Izola Declaration** which will be soon adopted by the Ministers of Foreign Affairs **sends a strong message in terms of importance of EU enlargement policy.**
- Let me also inform you about the fruitful collaboration with the **Central European Initiative**, two regional organization which clearly share the same objectives, to **facilitate the integration process and to promote economic growth and prosperity** in the region through concrete cooperation activities.
- It is exactly within this framework that the Permanent Secretariat realized together with the Executive Secretariat of the Central European Initiative, and also with the valuable support of the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, an initiative named “**Active Young Citizens for Sustainable Development in CEI and All areas**”, to raise awareness in high school students on the UN Agenda 2030 and its 17 Sustainable Development Goals.
- Let me conclude by wishing all success to the **Republic of Albania** that from June 2021 will hold the Chairmanship of the All.
- Thank you again for the invitation and for the constructive debate.