



VI Adriatic and Ionian Council / EUSAIR Ministerial Meeting

Izola Declaration

“ALONG THE SHORES OF THE SHARED SEA”

11 May 2021

We, the Representatives of the Governments of Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Greece, Italy, Montenegro, North Macedonia, Serbia and Slovenia, meeting in Izola (Slovenia), with the participation of a representative of the European Commission and in the presence of San Marino¹, in the framework of the Adriatic and Ionian Council/EUSAIR Ministerial Meeting and 6th Forum of the European Union Strategy for the Adriatic and Ionian Region:

1. GUIDED by the Ancona Declaration of 20 May 2000 and its basic principles, and RECALLING the Conclusions of the EU General Affairs Council (GAC) of 29 September 2014 and those of the European Council of 23–24 October 2014 which endorsed EUSAIR, on the basis of the Commission’s Communication of 17 June 2014, and the Addendum to the EUSAIR Communication {COM(2020) 132 final} adopted by the Commission on 2 April 2020, including North Macedonia in EUSAIR;
2. ACKNOWLEDGE the reality of 2020 and 2021 marked by the COVID-19 pandemic and RECOGNISE that a common European response and cooperation between the participating countries in the Adriatic-Ionian Region is needed to tackle the ongoing pandemic and face the key challenge of socio-economic recovery;
3. RECOGNISE that green connectivity as the key objective of the Slovenian Presidency of EUSAIR/AII² has contributed to improving the quality of life across the Adriatic and Ionian Region and should become a transversal component of all pillars in order to contribute to Europe’s green recovery and green future. In that context, we RECOGNISE EUSAIR’s

¹ As the AII member.

² EU Strategy for the Adriatic and Ionian Region and Adriatic and Ionian Initiative.

contribution to the EU Sustainable Blue Economy through establishment of Blue Corridors³;

4. COMMIT to steer the post-crisis recovery towards green & digital transition in line with the European Green Deal and the Green Agenda for the Western Balkans together with the communications “Shaping Europe's Digital Future⁴” and the “Economic and Investment Plan for the Western Balkans⁵” with the support of the funds from the relevant 2021–2027 EU funding programmes;
5. COGNISANT of the EUSAIR's unique attractiveness to new members, following the accession of North Macedonia in 2020, RESPOND POSITIVELY to the request put forward by the Republic of San Marino and PROPOSE to the Council of the European Union to undertake all necessary steps to include the Republic of San Marino in the EU Strategy for the Adriatic and Ionian Region; also TAKE NOTE of the application of Cyprus to participate in EUSAIR;
6. REAFFIRM the support for the European perspective of the Western Balkans as well as the Western Balkans' continued commitment to the European perspective, building on the importance of good neighbourly relations and regional cooperation enhanced through the strengthened commitment of EUSAIR/AII to facilitate the EU enlargement process in the Western Balkans;
7. ENCOURAGE the implementation of the recommendations set in the Youth Manifesto⁶ in the EUSAIR region, WELCOME the AII Permanent Secretariat activities in this direction; and SUPPORT further active engagement of young people in EUSAIR/AII implementation. Hence, we INVITE each of the following presiding countries to further develop and promote the Young POPRI⁷ network, and benefit from the best entrepreneurial ideas challenging the smart, green and sustainable transition of Adriatic Ionian Region;
8. COMMIT to further promote the inclusion of civil society, COMMEND the idea of the Slovenian EUSAIR/AII presidency awarding the Windmill of Excellence⁸ and conferring the honorary title of Ambassador of the EU Macro-Regional Strategy and AGREE that the conferment of the title could become a tradition at EUSAIR fora.
9. EMPHASISING the role of National Parliaments as direct representatives of the people, RECOGNISE the importance of the 17th Conference of the Presidents/Speakers of Parliaments organised by the Slovenian AII Presidency in April that focused on the

³ As discussed on the 13th Governing Board meeting and based on "EUSAIR Synthesis Report: Multi-level Governance and Cross-Sector Practices Supporting the European Union Strategy for the Adriatic and Ionian Region", OECD, 2019.

⁴ COM(2020)67 final

⁵ COM(2020) 641 final

⁶ Manifesto for Young People by Young People to shape the European Cooperation Policy, European Commission, October 2020.

⁷ POPRI international is a competition for the best entrepreneurial idea among young people from 9 countries of the Adriatic-Ionian macro region.

⁸ as specified in the "Proposal for a winner selection procedure and the awarding process for Ambassador of Macro-Regional Strategies 2021", presented at the 14th Governing Board meeting on 2 March 2021

evolving digital society with a special emphasis on the opportunities and pitfalls for the younger generation;

10. REAFFIRM our clear commitment to provide meaningful governance, underlining the importance of capacity building, to ensure effective implementation of EUSAIR and REITERATE the need for adequate governance support to be available in all EUSAIR participating countries through the next ADRION Transnational Cooperation Programme 2021–2027;
11. CONSIDER the necessity of the revision of the EUSAIR Action Plan to adapt the Strategy to the changes in its membership and respond better to current challenges including those generated by the COVID-19 pandemic;
12. CALL upon the Facility Point to further support the smooth implementation of EUSAIR, capacity-building activities, engagement of the stakeholders, with a special emphasis on young people, communication and dialogues to enable further steps towards the establishment of networks of Managing Authorities;
13. WELCOME the timely adoption of flagship projects at an extraordinary Governing Board on 10 June 2020. CALL on all EUSAIR participating countries, with the support of the European Commission, to embed them, in the best possible way, in their programming documents for the 2021–2027 period, making full use of the relevant networks of Managing and Planning Authorities to be set up for this purpose. We furthermore CALL on the EUSAIR Governing Board to closely monitor and, together with the European Commission, jointly assess the outcomes of the embedding process, and reflect the results of this assessment at the next EUSAIR Annual Forum;
14. REAFFIRM the traditional AII connecting role between Governments, regional actors and civil society FORA and their networks as an essential factor in the implementation phase of the macro-regional mechanism CONVINCED that subsidiarity is the key principle for success;
15. ACKNOWLEDGE the importance of contacts among secretariats of regional organisations in order to further develop synergies, exchange experience, best practices and know-how and WELCOME the results of the implementation of the Memorandum of Understanding between the CEI Executive Secretariat and the Adriatic and Ionian Initiative (AII) Permanent Secretariat signed in 2019, which resulted in a joint programme supporting “Active Young Citizens for Sustainable Development in Central European Initiative and Adriatic and Ionian Initiative Areas”;
16. CONFIRM the role of the AII as the “political anchorage” to EUSAIR and CONSIDER that efforts to fine-tune its activities and structures in order to contribute to the goals of the Strategy have achieved remarkable results mainly in the field of AII Round Tables, which now systematically cooperate with Thematic Steering Groups, providing them with the proposals and recommendations originating from civil society;

17. CONGRATULATE Slovenia for conducting a successful chairmanship over the EUSAIR and AII and, despite challenging times, successfully delivering numerous achievements as outlined in the Annex I and II to this declaration. In view of its forthcoming Presidency of Council of European Union, we ENCOURAGE Slovenia to further promote the contribution of macro-regional strategies to the EU enlargement process, the European Green Deal, Europe's Digital Transformation by 2030 and the Economic and Investment Plan for the Western Balkans;
18. ENTRUST the incoming AII/EUSAIR Chairmanship from 1 June 2021 to 31 May 2022 to Albania, inviting it to use all instruments at its disposal with the aim of leading all participating countries to sustainable social, environmental and economic prosperity in the Region.

ANNEX I

Achievements of the Slovenian EUSAIR Presidency

Slovenia is the seventh EUSAIR participating country to hold the EUSAIR Presidency. The period of the Slovenian Presidency was marked by the COVID-19 pandemic, which significantly increased the challenges EUSAIR and EU are facing.

Meaningful governance

The extraordinary circumstances required a transition to online working methods, which were, with the timely engagement of the EUSAIR Stakeholders Platform, introduced without any delay. National Coordinators and the Governing Board intensified their work, the number of meetings doubled. EUSAIR proved able to live up to the challenge of digital communication. This resulted in a significant increase in the attendance and active participation of all participating countries at all governance levels. Numerous shorter meetings allowed more thorough coordination between National Coordinators and Thematic Steering Group members and Pillar Coordinators. The capacity and competences of all EUSAIR implementers together with the enabling environment proved to be key for successful EUSAIR implementation.

Embedding

Building on the 2018 Catania Ministerial Declaration, in June 2020 the Governing Board jointly agreed on the macro-regional priorities (*EUSAIR flagship projects*). The Presidency shared the EUSAIR flagships with all Programming/Managing Authorities and invited them to embed them into national/regional programmes with the support of the “*financial dialogues*”. The monitoring of the embedding process was launched during the March 2021 Governing Board meeting in line with the Council Conclusions⁹. In April 2021, the joint presentation of EUSAIR flagships to all mainstream, transnational and cross-border programmes, as a step towards establishing networks of (managing) authorities of relevant 2021–2027 EU funding programmes, was organised as an initiative aimed at enhancing embedding networking experiences at national level.

EU enlargement Policy

Welcoming North Macedonia as a new EUSAIR member country, the Presidency was seen through the lens of general recognition of the MRS contribution to European Enlargement and Neighbourhood Policies. Close cooperation continued within the work of the EUSAIR TRIO Presidency (Serbia, Slovenia, Albania). The SI Presidency initiated a consultation process to assess the relevance of EUSAIR flagships for the Economic and Investment Plan and Green Agenda for the Western Balkans, which could significantly accelerate the implementation of the latter. The process that was tested on the thematic areas of environment and transport connectivity allows for identification of EUSAIR (flagship) to be implemented through IPA III support and could significantly speed up EIP/GA

⁹ 13075/20

implementation and thus contribute to a new growth model in the Western Balkans. EUSAIR as a functioning platform can contribute to IPA III implementation with relevance, maturity and capacity. The Presidency called all interested actors and countries to continue exploring possibilities in other areas of EUSAIR activities, too.

Cross-MRS Coordination

The Presidency intensively coordinated activities in relation to the embedding process with other actors active in the Adriatic-Ionian region such as EUSDR and EUSALP, and other transnational cooperation programmes to pool all available resources, financial and human, in well-coordinated actions. In September 2020, it hosted the third meeting of chairpersons of the National Coordination Groups (TRIO presidencies of the four macro-regional strategies) focusing on the optimisation of the monitoring and evaluation of the embedding process and meaningful governance, including governance support.

Stakeholder involvement

In September 2020, Slovenia hosted, for the fifth time in Izola, the *Mediterranean Coast and Macro-regional Strategies Week 2020*. It attracted more than 1000 participants from the Baltic, Danube, Alpine and Adriatic-Ionian region, who discussed common challenges, best practices and joint actions. The event comprehensively addressed the COVID-19 challenges in the tourism sector, the need for systematic planning of green infrastructure for self-sufficient food production in the EU, EUSAIR smart specialisation strategies for a green and smart Europe, and, with the support of the Interact programme, macro-regional and EUSAIR contribution to the European Green Deal and Green Agenda for the Western Balkans.

We look forward to the 6th Mediterranean Coast and Macro-regional Strategies Week 2021 that will be hosted by North Macedonia and thus a continuation of good practice of intensive stakeholder involvement and local population activation across the EUSAIR region developed in the last five years in Izola, Slovenia.

Annual Forums

Two Annual Forums marked the Slovenian Presidency. Due to the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, the extraordinary 5th Annual Forum was organised by the Serbian Presidency in January 2021. The regular 6th Annual Forum took place in May 2021 under the Slovenian Presidency. The agreed flexibility between the two presidencies maintained a high level of political ownership and allowed for broad exchange between multiple stakeholders on EUSAIR achievements and future challenges.

Youth and civil society engagement

The Presidency initiated, facilitated and financially supported different forms of youth engagement. The Presidency addressed Climate Change Challenges in the educational process, exchanged between generations on how best to exploit EUSAIR for a securing common future and established the functioning EUSAIR network of technological parks

that are offering knowledge support to educational institutions and mentors to train young (14–29-year-olds) in entrepreneurial thinking. National competitions (POPRI) for the best entrepreneurial ideas took place in all EUSAIR countries, whereas final competition took place during the Annual Forum that awarded the best ones. Facility Point grasped the opportunity of the Forum being organised virtually to boost EUSAIR's visibility among young people, including through the pre-Forum event *Many generations – one future!* in which the EUSAIR idea is presented to interested students, young researchers, mentors and professors.

To increase EUSAIR's visibility within civil society, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Slovenia decided to, for the first time during the EUSAIR Annual Forum, award the *Windmill of Excellence* – an honorary title of the MRS Ambassador to civil society representatives who used their vast experience in developing macro-regional strategies to contribute to the common good.

Thematic focus: Green Connectivity

With the establishment of green connectivity as the thematic focus of the Slovenian Presidency, it has become a crosscutting issue shared by the Strategy and beyond. The environmental evaluation matrix was recognised as a tool for greening EUSAIR across all four of its thematic steering groups. *The handbook for green infrastructure for spatial planning* enhances cooperation for sustainable solutions among the EUSAIR Pillars, countries and EU regions for the safer future of young generations. Eco-connectivity has been a source of cooperation with the Danube macro-region through the establishment of blue corridors in shared riverine ecosystems. The establishment of blue corridors to the sea in the process of Marine Spatial Planning is a measure to improve the functional connectivity of ecological networks and should contribute to sustainable fisheries and navigation in marine ecoregions and will concretely contribute to the EU Sustainable Blue Economy in marine ecoregions.

ANNEX II

Achievements of the Slovenian AII Chairmanship

- ❖ The AII Slovenian Chairmanship organised numerous AII Round Tables:
 - Round Table on Inter-University Cooperation in the Adriatic and Ionian Region, organised by the AII Slovenian Chairmanship in cooperation with UNIADRION and the AII Permanent Secretariat on 17 November 2020;
 - Round Table on “Societal Challenges: Crisis management and marketing communication during COVID-19” organised by the AII Slovenian Chairmanship in cooperation with the AII Permanent Secretariat and the Fora of Civil Society (Chambers of Commerce, Cities and Universities) on 27 January;
 - Round Table on “Preservation of Natural resources, Innovation and Robotics for the development of the economy in the Adriatic-Ionian Region” organised by the AII Slovenian Chairmanship in cooperation with the AII Permanent Secretariat and the Fora of Civil Society (Chambers of Commerce, Cities and Universities) on 27 January;
 - Round Table on “The COVID-19 pandemic – imposed catalyst for Women’s Entrepreneurship progress in the Adriatic and Ionian Region?” organised by the AII Slovenian Chairmanship in cooperation with the AII Permanent Secretariat and the Fora of Civil Society (Chambers of Commerce, Cities and Universities) on 29 January;
 - Round Table on Equal Opportunities organised by the AII Slovenian Chairmanship in cooperation with the Forum of the Adriatic and Ionian Chambers of Commerce and the AII Permanent Secretariat on 24 March;
 - Round Table on “Saline intrusion: a potential risk for coastal aquifer management in a changing climate” organised by the AII Slovenian Chairmanship in cooperation with the AII Permanent Secretariat and the Fora of Civil Society (Chambers of Commerce, Cities and Universities) on 10 May;
 - Round Table on “Small ports in the Blue Growth strategy”, organised by the AII Slovenian Chairmanship in cooperation with the AII Permanent Secretariat and the Fora of Civil Society (Chambers of Commerce, Cities and Universities) on 10 May;
 - Round Table on “SMEs towards the circular economy”, organised by the AII Slovenian Chairmanship in cooperation with the AII Permanent Secretariat and the Forum of the Adriatic and Ionian Chambers of Commerce on 12 May.

- ❖ Along with the Round Tables, the Slovenian Presidency organised on 9 December 2020 (online) the second meeting of the Fora of Civil Society (Chambers of Commerce, Cities and Universities) plus the AII Permanent Secretariat with the AII Slovenian Chairmanship, further demonstrating a growing awareness of the role and the contribution that civil society is increasingly bringing – as well as through their involvement in the AII Round Tables – to the EUSAIR Strategy process;

- ❖ The Chamber of Commerce and Industry of Primorska joined the Forum of the Adriatic and Ionian Chambers of Commerce as an ordinary member, within the framework of the 2020–2021 AII Slovenian Chairmanship;

- ❖ The second AII Troika plus Secretariat meeting took place on 25 March 2021 (online), as an innovative and constructive mechanism to assure the continuity and the synergy of AII and EUSAIR activities;
- ❖ The 17th Conference of Speakers of National Parliaments of the AII was organised on 15 April 2021 by the National Assembly of Slovenia, focusing primarily on the issues of the young generation and challenges that it faces in particular during the pandemic of COVID-19. The speakers also adopted a Joint Conference Statement, pointing out their views on future cooperation in the AII region and the role of parliaments as directly elected representatives of the people.
- ❖ In addition to this, members of the Slovene National Assembly participated as key note speakers at the two above-mentioned events in November and December 2020, thus acknowledging the importance of broad cooperation and recognising the role of civil society in the AII region.
- ❖ The AII Slovenian Presidency introduced new topics of cooperation such as Equal Opportunities, Women's Entrepreneurship and Women's Empowerment;
- ❖ Within the framework of the AII Slovenian Chairmanship, the second meeting of the AII Ombudspersons was held on 24 August (online) by the AII Permanent Secretariat in cooperation with the Office of the Marche Region Ombudsman and the EUSAIR Facility Point, to discuss the issue of the protection and promotion of the rights of children in the Adriatic-Ionian Region, sharing best practices and instruments to protect children and adolescents in emergency situations. The Declaration of Intent on the Protection and Promotion of Children's Rights in the framework of the EU Strategy for Adriatic-Ionian Region / Adriatic and Ionian Initiative was approved as a concrete outcome of the meeting;
- ❖ In Cooperation with EUSAIR Facility Point, under the Slovenian Presidency, the AII Permanent Secretariat organised the webinar "Fundamental Rights and EU Enlargement: prospects in the Adriatic-Ionian Area" on 25 August (online), which explored ways to advance the protection of fundamental rights while at the same time moving forward with the enlargement process in the Western Balkans;
- ❖ The initiative "Active Young Citizens for Sustainable Development in CEI and AII areas", co-organised by the CEI and AII Secretariats, designed to stimulate the engagement of young people in the Central European Initiative and the Adriatic and Ionian Initiative regions in order to raise awareness on the UN Agenda 2030 and its 17 Sustainable Development Goals.