

**14th meeting of the Thematic Steering Group for
Pillar 3 – Environmental Quality
under the EU Strategy for the Adriatic and Ionian Region (EUSAIR)
29 March 2021**

APPROVED MINUTES

Venue: online on GoToMeeting

Chairs: Pillar 3 coordinators: Mitja Bricelj (SI) and Senad Oprašić (BiH) – absent.

Participants: Members of the EUSAIR Thematic Steering Group 3 (TSG 3), representatives of EUSAIR Facility Point Lead Partner (GODC) and Project partners Municipality of Izola (SI) (Annex 1).

Seven countries (SI, HR, MNE, BiH, IT, GR, SR) out of nine were represented at the meeting. Albania and North Macedonia were missing. The Chairs verified the presence of the members and confirmed that a quorum was reached.

The participants were welcomed by Mitja Bricelj (SI), pillar 3 co-coordinator, that excused Senad Oprašić (BiH) that could not attend the meeting.

Item 1: The Agenda was presented by Chair Mitja Bricelj (SI). As the members raised no objections, the Agenda was adopted.

Conclusions under Item 1:

C.1. The Agenda was presented by Chairs Mitja Bricelj (SI) and adopted.

Item 2: The Minutes of the 13th TSG3 meeting (Online, December 2020) were presented by Chair Mitja Bricelj (SI). There were no amendments to the Minutes during the meeting.

Conclusions under Item 2:

C.2 The Minutes of the 13th TSG3 meeting (online, December 2020) were approved.

Item 3: Co-chair Mitja Bricelj (SI) shared the key messages of the Technical Pillar Coordinators meeting (PC meeting), at which the Pillar coordinators reported about the work done within TSG 3: mainly the involvement of TSG3 at the 5th EUSAIR Forum and at the 2nd EU MRS week with the contribution to the Workshop “*Contribution of EUSAIR and EUSDR priorities to the implementation of Economic and Investment Plan for Western Balkans*’. The TSG3 also contributed to the importance the blue and green corridors have in spatial planning procedures and also in sustainable blue economy, fishery and maritime ecoregions. Italian member Olga Sedioli (IT) asked for further information regarding the work of other pillars to which Staša Mesec (FP LP) added that all the information regarding other pillars can be found on the EUSAIR Intranet.

Item 4: A recap of the Governing Board, 11 February /2nd March 2021 (Brussels– online) was presented by Staša Mesec (FP LP). The main points were: implementation of Ad-hoc EUSAIR Task Force for future of EUSAIR Governance in the programme period 2021-2027 – PC coordinators were invited to send inputs for 6th EUSAIR Forum – nomination for the MRS Ambassador, Windmill of Excellence – Online meeting to present first outcomes of EUSAIR evaluation – presentation of two studies by EC – request

to include San Marino and Cyprus in EUSAIR – organisation of MAs of mainstream, transnational and cross-border programmes in the EUSAIR territory on 15th of April.

Item 5: Co-chair Mitja Bricelj presented key Messages of the TSG3 panel session at the 5th EUSAIR FORUM on 29 January 2021 (Annex 2). The title of the session was: *“Importance of blue and green infrastructure in light of the new EU Post 2020 biodiversity framework: How to enhance the delivery of essential ecosystem services throughout the Adriatic – Ionian Region?”*. The main focus on flagship *Protection and enhancement of natural terrestrial habitats and ecosystems*. Chair highlighted the importance of lineages between the green and blue corridors and nature RVB of Dinaric ecoregion.

Item 6: Giuseppe Di Paola (EC DG REGIO) presented 4 main conclusions of the 2 EU Macroregional strategies week that was held from 1- 5 March 2021. Key conclusions:

1. *Involvement of Civil Society:* we must find a way to include civil society into MRS as they are too institutional. *In the case of the environment, there is a clear call to TSG III members to involve as much as possible environmental NGOs and associations in the region.*
2. *Involvement of Youth:* all MRS must find a way to include youth into their actions. Additional activities to strengthen the work with youth will be made during Albanian presidency to EUSAIR as it coincides with Tirana being the Youth Capital in 2022.
3. *The need to establish a role of MRS to support COVID recovery.* To modernise and update the strategies and rethink how we see the world and plan the future, starting now.
4. *Importance of EMBEDDING and funds directly managed by the European Commission: how to use EU funds to support MRS. Following the presentation at the MRS week and according to the request of 27 Member States (Council Conclusions of 3 December), TSG coordinators are requested to organize workshops for project beneficiaries to present the opportunities deriving from EU directly managed funds (relevant for environmental protection – e.g. LIFE) and their links and possible use in the framework of MRS.*

Item 6.1 Aleš Rovšnik, Ministry of Foreign Affairs Slovenia presented the Recap of Workshop *“Contribution of EUSAIR and EUSDR priorities to the implementation of Economic and Investment Plan for Western Balkans”*. The main focus of the workshop was to promote the meaning of the enlargement process and to showcase the significant overlap between EUSAIR, EUSDR and EIP topics and flagships. After the desk research it was found that the strongest links can be identified in the area of Connectivity, Economic development and Environment. The importance of the workshop was to include all relevant stakeholders and present the common links to answer the question how to utilize the best the existing link between EIP and EUSAIR and EUSDR flagship in Western Balkans. Mitja Bricelj complimented the workshop and presented the idea to prepare a common work plan in order to start thinking about new common issues to successfully candidate with the projects proposals in the next program period 2021-2027 and also to contribute to the implementation of the EU Green deal.

Item 7. Co-chair Mitja Bricelj presented the draft program of the TSG 3 Panel session at the 6th EUSAIR Forum May 2021, Izola, Slovenia (Annex 3). The theme of the program and title of the session *“Sustainable Use of Coastal & Marine Resources for a Healthy Future Through Green and*

Smart Recovery” was agreed upon by all members. Co-chair invited the members to propose possible panelist until 9th of April 2021.

Conclusions under Item 7:

C.3 Member agreed on the proposed theme and program of the TSG 3 Panel session.

C.4 Members agreed to send the proposal of the panellists until 9th April 2021.

Item 8. External expert for monitoring and evaluation Anuška Štoka presented “*Yearly condensed report on pillar/TSG 3 monitoring*” (Annex 4) foreseen within WP 3 EUSAIR Facility Point project for TSG3. It includes also the report on the survey that was circulated between different Managing Authorities in order to evaluate the work on communication regarding the Flagship projects.

Conclusions under Item 8:

C.5 Members adopted presented document.

Item 9. Greek member Eva Alexopoulou presented new project idea proposal “*Botanical gardens as biodiversity shelters and nurseries*” (Annex 5). The project idea complies with the TSG3 flagship: “PROTECTION AND ENHANCEMENT OF NATURAL TERRESTRIAL HABITATS AND ECOSYSTEMS”. Members welcome the approach and project idea was approved.

Conclusions under Item 9:

C.6. The TSG 3 project proposal “Botanical gardens as biodiversity shelters and nurseries” was approved.

Item 10. FP PP Izola presented the TSG 3 Activity plan with already identified TSG 3 events. All TSG 3 members are invited to send proposals and updates of the activity plan throughout the year with no deadline (Annex 6).

Item 11.

Under AOB:

- Madalina Ivanica from DG ENV and two EPPA program representatives presented the study “*Green Infrastructure deployment and ecological connectivity in Western Balkans*” (relevant for the EUSAIR and EUSDR). The study presents the possibilities on how EPPA and the Green agenda can help with the development of the projects regarding the green and blue corridors. It is focusing on ecological connectivity status, including identification of core conservation areas, main green corridors and ecosystem fragmentation. One of the main outcomes of the study is the identification of priority areas, ecosystem restoration and green infrastructure deployment needed and aimed to contribute to the goals of national legislation. It was prepared to deliver knowledge base solutions and capacity building to reduce land base causes of pollution. As the project has not yet ended they invite TSG3 members to propose some further actions to better comply with country’s and pillar needs. Giuseppe di Paola commented on success of the presentation and that there are any specific needs from the EUSAIR they should be included in the study. The study is also in line with the TSG Flagships and offers concrete proposals that could help with implementation in EUSAIR. The question was posed regarding the priority areas at the border between Serbia and Croatia or North Macedonia and Greece as the border between IPA and EU countries. The presented replayed that there were but are not eligible to be included in this study. Once finalized, the study will be shared with TSG members and will serve as basis for the implementation of the EUSAIR flagship and for the revision of the strategy.

- TSG3 member from Italy Valentina Mauriello greeted all the participants and introduced herself. She announced their wish to participate at the 6. EUSAIR Forum and also to work together with other TSG3 members. She encouraged the members to take into account the discussion and presentation and implementation of all MRS projects as we have common tools and can demonstrate synergies in the whole region. She also encouraged to work on a new Sub regional contingency plan and draw synergies between Barcelona convention and Adriatic-Ionian strategy. There is the strong need to guarantee the full synergy and alignment of the ongoing processes in the mediterranean region, and its Adriatic sub region, as the Barcelona Convention Ecosystem Approach and its Implementation and Assessment Program (IMAP), with the EU Maritime Strategy Framework Directive and the EU Maritime Spatial Planning Directive so to avoid duplication and overlapping of such processes. Adriatic Ionian region will thus be the pilot case where those ~~two~~ processes come together and demonstrate synergies. The idea is already confirmed by the secretariat of Barcelona convention and European Commission. Member agreed with the idea. She also announced that there will be some new members to the TSG3. She will send updated list of their members.
- Co-chair Mitja Bricelj pointed out at the result of the 13th TSG3 Meeting conclusion C9 ***“Pillar co-coordinators will ask the Governing board for an update about guidelines for the economic zones initiative in the Adriatic-Ionian Region.”*** and pointed out that no answer was given so far and that the question should be addressed again. The members agreed that this point is again put in the conclusions.
- Ivana Stojanovic TSG3 member from Montenegro announced some changes in as the new government has been established and with this some new members to TSG3 will be proposed. She will update the list of the members. She also pointed out that Montenegro started the discussion regarding the Sub regional contingency plan project.
- Greek member Eva Alexopoulou informed the members that the TSG3 and TSG4 are preparing a new project idea *'Network of Ecotourism Destinations in the AI Macro Region through the employment of smart technology applications'*. She will give further details regarding the project when there will be more information.
- Members discussed the date of the 15th TSG3 meeting and agreed that it will be held in October 2021.

Conclusions under Item 10:

C.7 Pillar co-coordinators will once again ask the Governing board for an update about guidelines for the economic zones initiative in the Adriatic-Ionian Region.

C.8 Member will update the list of the TSG3 standing members and their contacts.

C.9 The next TSG3 meeting will be held in October 2021.