



February 9, 2024

Dear EUSAIR National Coordinators,  
Dear EUSAIR Pillar Coordinators,  
Dear colleagues,

It is our distinct pleasure to inform you about the basic concept and logistics of the forthcoming 9<sup>th</sup> Forum of the European Union Strategy for the Adriatic and Ionian Region (EUSAIR), as well as some expectations we, as Presidency, have from this event.

### Concept and expectations

The title of the Forum is *Shaping the Future of EUSAIR*. Croatia took over the Presidency of EUSAIR while it was deeply immersed in the process of **revision of the Strategy Action Plan and Communication**. A process which had several phases and important components, while being on the work agenda of four consecutive Presidencies (current one included). As the revision process progressed from the initial idea to its current shape, it also grew in scope, complexity and quality. Croatia views this revision process, particularly its latter, more advanced phases, as a valuable example of substantial multi-state, multi-stakeholder dialogue towards one shared vision. It was clear from the outset that this vision meant a rejuvenated, more pertinent, more effective, more future-proof EUSAIR.

In parallel, a different, similarly critical process was underway. The participating countries decided to evolve the current EUSAIR Facility Point project to a new, more robust, three-branched governance support structure – the **EUSAIR Governance Point**. Duties and responsibilities are now shared more equally among greater number of countries. By sharing the burden and increasing the sense of ownership, and by refining the support structure's functions and the way they are implemented, participating countries hope to contribute further to the aforementioned vision of a modernised EUSAIR.

A *Strategy for the future* seems futile without an effective **involvement of youth**, whose opinions must be taken into account. Through an array of meetings of the Youth Task Force, coupled with findings gathered from the youth consultation exercise overseen by the Facility Point Lead Partner, participating countries have managed to bring this vital process close to a key milestone – establishment of the EUSAIR Youth Council. With it, youth of the Adriatic-Ionian region will gain a platform for wider collaboration and active participation in shaping the socio-economic development of their living space, in line with the overarching objectives of the EUSAIR.

None of this happens in a vacuum. At the EU level, policies and politics are constantly moving forward. The discussion on **post-2027 Cohesion Policy** is in full swing. The Group of high-level specialists on the future of Cohesion Policy gave us first insights into what the future might look like, but it also concluded that in order to shape the future, we must all be actively involved. Interreg programmes and macro-regional strategies took this role seriously and are already discussing and analysing what would be the best way to move forward. The first draft



of the next Cohesion Policy legislative package should be ready in the first half of 2025; it is important that the voice of EUSAIR be clearly heard in this process.

So, dear colleagues, have we delivered? Have we managed to adjust our Strategy so that it better corresponds with current thinking and aspirations of key stakeholders? Have we managed to make it more attractive to end-users, to youth? Did we illuminate the way to more funding? Will our new Strategy be more adaptable to future challenges, easier to modify? Will it have the much-needed political backing, both from the participating countries and the appropriate European Commission's services? How will the future setup of the Cohesion Policy affect the EU macro-regions? What will be expected from the macro-regional strategies?

The annual EUSAIR Forum has several important functions. Most of all, it is a place for key Adriatic-Ionian stakeholders to gather, openly discuss ideas, take stock of yesterday and suggest new pathways for tomorrow. With the EUSAIR revision process in its final phase, the Youth Council firmly en route to establishment, and the in-depth discussion on EUSAIR governance well underway, Croatia believes there is sufficient reason for a positive assessment of our recent joint efforts. At the same time, we have to look ahead and understand what the future holds, so that we can continue developing our subject matter and refining our working methods, for the overall benefit and increased prosperity of our citizens.

Croatia hopes that the 9<sup>th</sup> EUSAIR Forum may stimulate an **honest discussion and assessment of our Strategy** at a historic turning point, as it continues on its journey with, hopefully, new vigour and determination.

We warmly invite you to discuss these and many other paramount questions at this year's Forum!

## **Logistics**

The 9<sup>th</sup> EUSAIR Forum, hosted by Croatia's Presidency, will be organised jointly by the Ministry of Foreign and European Affairs of Croatia, Ministry of Regional Development and EU Funds of Croatia, and Facility Point Project Partner from Croatia (at the Ministry of Tourism and Sport of Croatia), in close cooperation with the European Commission and supported by the EUSAIR Facility Point.

The official part of the Forum will take place on **15-16 May 2024**. One day prior, on **14 May 2024**, ministerial dinner will be offered to heads of delegations, and some important and interesting side-events will take place. On **17 May 2024**, additional side-events may be organised, if requested. In addition, on **17 May 2024**, the hosts of the Forum will offer optional sightseeing tours.

The place and venue of the Forum will be communicated in a separate note to all stakeholders, at the earliest possible time.



## Forum sessions

The official opening of the Forum will be on the morning of 15 May 2024, preceded by the **Adriatic Ionian Council / EUSAIR Ministerial Meeting** (closed meeting), and followed by the **High-Level Panel** and the Presidency hand-over ceremony. The topic of the High-Level Panel will be *Post-2027 Cohesion – what is needed for the EUSAIR macro-region?*

The Forum will be organised in a usual fashion, comprising of mostly **one-hour to one-hour and thirty-minute sessions**. Each Pillar that so chooses (or more Pillars jointly) will be allocated one such time slot and it is expected to pick a topic freely and organise its panel in terms of both content and speakers, with support from the hosts of the Forum. The Pillar Coordinators are kindly requested to get in touch with the Presidency soon so that proper arrangements can be made on time.

Other sessions dedicated to various topics of interest for the Adriatic-Ionian Region will be organised or supported by the hosts of the Forum, including **Interreg IPA ADRION**, **Business-to-Business**, and three **Adriatic-Ionian Fora** events, as well as special sessions dedicated to **digitalisation** of the public sector, **digital sovereignty** for Europe, **public procurement**, and Cohesion Policy's **Simplified Cost Options** (SCOs) procedure.

More details on the programme and organisation of the Forum will be communicated to all stakeholders in the following weeks and months. In the meantime, National Coordinators and Pillar Coordinators are encouraged to contact the Presidency when in need of any clarifications and/or guidance.

Yours sincerely,

Croatian EUSAIR Presidency