

**20th Meeting of the Thematic Steering Group for
Pillar 3 - Environmental Quality
under the EU strategy for the Adriatic and Ionian Region (EUSAIR)
8-9 April, 2024**

DRAFT MINUTES

Venue: Hrvatske vode, Ul. grada Vukovara 220, 10000, Zagreb

Chairs: Mitja Bricelj – the Chair, Senad Oprašić – the Co-Chair,

Participants: Members of the EUSAIR Thematic Steering Group 3 (TSG 3), representatives of the EUSAIR Facility Point Lead Partner, representatives of the SP4EUSAIR Lead Partner, Representatives of the European Commission, Project partner Municipality of Izola (SI),

Eight countries (SI, BiH, CRO, MNE, SR, ITA, N.MAC, AL) out of ten were present on first day of the meeting. Greece and Republic of San Marino were not present. On the 2nd day eight countries (SI, BiH, CRO, MNE, SR, IT, N.MAC, GR) were present at the meeting. Albania and Republic of San Marino were not present. The Chairs verified the attendance and confirmed that the quorum was established on both days.

The participants were welcomed by Pillar 3 Co-coordinator Mitja Bricelj (SI), who officially opened the 20th Meeting of the TSG 3. The Chair thanked the host country Croatia for the hospitality and gave the floor to the Croatian National coordinator. The Croatian National Coordinator warmly welcomed everyone to Zagreb on behalf of the Croatian National Coordination Team and current Croatian Presidency of EUSAIR, expressing thanks to colleagues from the Ministry of Economy and Sustainable Development for coordinating the meeting. He commended the impressive work done on the Action Plan, noting it as the most important task for the presidency and national coordination. The Croatian National Coordinator congratulated the team on their hard work and expressed hope for successful meeting.

The Chair gave the floor to Albania, who expressed gratitude for the invitation and conveyed the anticipation for the discussions scheduled for that and following day. She acknowledged receiving the action plan for review and comments, admitting that she hadn't had much time to delve into it due to numerous ongoing activities. However, she assured the group that she would provide her comments in writing.

The chair thanked Albania and expressed delight in their participation in the meeting. It was noted that their involvement was highly valuable, and the discussions on all agenda items were eagerly anticipated. Before proceeding, gratitude was extended once again to the Croatian Presidency. The progress of the work was acknowledged with satisfaction. With that said, the meeting moved to the first agenda item.

Item 1: Adoption of the agenda

The agenda was presented by Chair Mitja Bricelj. On the morning of April 8, 2024, Italy requested via email to rearrange the agenda and include, as first item, as agreed during the extraordinary TSG3 meeting held on 22nd March, the discussion and approval of TSG3 indicators

The Chair gave the floor to Italy, who explained that the proposal had been made to reflect the decision taken at the above mentioned extraordinary meeting and that the discussion on indicators would likely take up most of the day and needed to be finalized promptly to avoid undermine its conclusion due to a lack of time. Since the first draft of the agenda that had been circulated was already a full two-

days agenda and in order to ensure to have enough time for the Action Plan item discussion, Italy proposed to decide on the following points:

- 1) items to be dealt in person;
- 2) items to be addressed in written form or discussed under Agenda Item AOB if there was time left.

The Chair noted a logistical issue as Greece would not be present on first day of the meeting and stressed the importance of addressing agenda item 7, *the Report on the state of the art and inputs from TSG 3 members on the transformation of project concepts into bankable projects*, which was connected to the proposed new agenda item on the Action Plan. The chair opened the floor for discussion on how to efficiently adjust the agenda.

Chair also noted that Greece would be present only during the second day, so Italy proposed to discuss indicators on the first day of the meeting and to reach an agreement on the Action Plan on the second day of the meeting, in the morning.

The Chair invited Project partner Municipality of Izola (SI) to take the floor, who emphasized that certain technical agenda items, such as the Formal adoption of the Minutes of the 19th meeting, the Modification of the Annual Progress Report for 2023, and the item that addressed panel session on the 9th EUSAIR Forum, would require minimal time and could have been addressed quickly before moving to the Action Plan Item.

It was proposed that the Items 2 and 3 remain as originally proposed, the 9th EUSAIR Forum becoming new Item 4, and the Decision on the revision of the Action Plan becoming new Item 5, thus renumbering all the other items, starting with the previous item 4, which becomes the new item 6.

All permanent members agreed to the proposed change to the agenda and the agenda was adopted.

Conclusions under Item 1:

C. 1. The agenda was adopted with an amendment to the original item No. 5 (EUSAIR Forum 15-16 May 2014, Croatia), which became the new item 4. Additionally, the Item Decision on the revision of the Action Plan was added as item 5. The original Item 4 (Recap of activities of TSG3 coordinators from the last meeting) became Item 6, and the item Conclusions and next steps of Day 1 became Item 7. The rest of the items of the agenda changed accordingly.

Item 2: Formal adoption of the Minutes of the 19th meeting of TSG-3, 17 November 2023, On-line

The minutes of the 19th meeting of TSG 3 (November 2023) were presented by the Project partner Municipality of Izola (SI). They explained that the minutes had been previously completed by the Italian members and that all changes were included in the presented document. It was noted, that the minutes with the Italian amendments were sent to all TSG 3 members and no other comments were received.

The amendments from Italy were accepted and the minutes were adopted.

Conclusions under Item 2:

C.2. The minutes of the 19th TSG3 meeting (On-line, 17 November 2023) were adopted with the integrations from Italy.

Item 3: Modification of the Annual Progress Report for the year 2023 following written procedure.

The Annual Progress Report for the year 2023 was presented by the Chair, and said that TSG 3 members already received the document in advanced, so he will not go into details. The chair opened the floor for discussion.

Italy first of all proposed a modification on the title of the Item as follows: *Modification of the Annual Progress Report for the year 2023 following the written procedure*, with the clarification that Written procedure had been performed and the comments from Italy had been received, so the written procedure had been carried out regularly.

The Chair invited Project partner Municipality of Izola (SI) to take the floor, who clarified that the agenda item title implies a prior written procedure that failed to reach a conclusion for which was opened. Therefore, the document with the proposed additions must be discussed during the meeting. Italy added that the title is tricky, as it can be read like the failure of the process itself. The Item was adopted with the following title: *Modification of the Annual Progress Report for the year 2023 following the written procedure*.

Additionally, Italy asked if the formal document with the Italian comments was uploaded since they could not find it among the documents for the meeting. Following clarification that the document had indeed been uploaded, it was then displayed, including the new Annex 4.

Conclusions under Item 3:

C.3. The Item was adopted with the following title: “Modification of the Annual Progress Report for the year 2023 following the written procedure”. The Annual Progress Report for the year 2023 was also adopted with the amendments from Italy.

Item 4: 9th EUSAIR Forum 15-16 May 2024, Croatia

Project partner Municipality of Izola (SI), presented the Item 4. It was noted that the TSG 3 members were asked to propose panellists for the TSG 3 panel session at the 9th EUSAIR Forum, and a proposal was received from Greece for Dr. Evangelia V. Avramidou whose presentation will be titled Preserve and monitor genetic diversity and biodiversity in green corridors. Additionally, two other panellists were introduced: Mr. Stefano Filacorda, presenting on the 4Pethabeco project, implementing PETHABECO flagship, concerning carnivores, and Ms. Anna Maconato from the Central European Initiative, presenting on the ASAP project, which deals with implementing a contingency plan for the Central and South Adriatic.

The Chair provided an explanation of the proposed title of the panel "Blue and Green Corridors: Implementation of TSG 3 EUSAIR Flagships with Interreg IPA ADRION." The Chair emphasized that this follow up on the tangible results of a decade-long efforts, beginning from the 1st EUSAIR Forum in Dubrovnik. At that forum, TSG 3 presented its vision for blue and green corridors, encompassing terrestrial and marine areas, to address TSG 3 activities and eco-connectivity, which is essential for enhancing good ecological status in Adriatic Ionian region, considering river basins, coastal, and marine ecosystems.

The Chair added that, over the years, this vision has evolved into transboundary flagship projects that TSG 3 is currently efficiently implementing, translating them into tangible realities, taking into account all the challenges, especially mentioning the lack of human resources at all levels of administration in each country. The Chair added that taking all this into account he is proud about the high level of consensus achieved among

TSG3 members, highlighted the priority status of these issues and projects. Now, more administrations are recognizing the importance of these consensuses among countries in steering towards a sustainable green and blue developmental economy future.

The Chair gave the word to the Co-Chair, who highlighted that the Forum is an excellent opportunity for Bosnia and Herzegovina to present its activities regarding the completion of the Coastal Area Management Plan (CAMP). The Plan was recently sent to relevant institutions for approval, and once approved, it will be forwarded to the ministers for adoption. Subsequently, in the next phase of activities, through EUSAIR and the Barcelona Convention, efforts will be made to enhance capacity building concerning these activities. It was emphasized that these activities require continuity and will demonstrate BIH's readiness to engage in this process. BIH was the last country to implement CAMP, drafting the contingency plan. In alignment with this, the Co-Chair expressed the intent to find a suitable person to explain BIH's actions at the 9th Forum, and if not possible, the Co-Chair would provide the explanation himself.

The Chair expressed gratitude to the Co-Chair for the comprehensive explanation. Italy was then given the floor. Prior to approving the proposed panellists, Italy asked that TSG 3 members receive some insight into the presentations. The Italian member highlighted that since the mentioned session represents Pillar 3, it is essential that TSG 3 members take responsibility for what is presented and therefore she proposed circulating a concept of presentations before the approval of panellists.

The Chair gave the floor to Project partner Municipality of Izola (SI), who clarified that the scope and objective of the session could be found in the Pillar Session template document (note: displayed on the screen and available on Intranet as a document for the meeting). Italy responded that while the general scope contained in the circulated template document is understood and while agreeing on the proposed topic, they would like a clearer understanding of the specific content to be presented before approving the speakers. The Chair gave the floor to Project partner Municipality of Izola (SI), who acknowledged the concern but highlighted the need to communicate with the panellists due to the approaching forum, indicating potential accommodation issues if approval is delayed. Italy suggested that brief outlines of presentations would suffice. The Croatian National Coordinator, speaking on behalf of the presidency, noted flexibility in the matter. The Chair acknowledged the proposal and stated that it's important to note that this was the first time TSG 3 Pillar has been required to do so, especially at such short notice. This represents a new approach to organizing such events and has not been a practice, which may not be very productive or comfortable. He added that nevertheless, the request will be accommodated. Additionally, the Chair urged everyone to adhere to common standards in the future to avoid complications for the Pillar.

Italy emphasized the importance of TSG3 ownership, particularly in Pillar 3 sessions where external panellists will present topics. While it's acceptable to have external experts to present TSG3 topics, TSG 3 members should be informed about the content of the presentation. The Chair emphasized the collaborative nature of the process, highlighting the need for efficiency in meeting requests while maintaining standards. The Municipality of Izola (SI) proposed conditional approval of the panellists.

The Croatian National Coordinator raised concerns about accommodation costs, that are covered by Croatian Project Partner, as the deadline for conformation of the panellists and title that was already passed.

The Chair gave the floor to Project partner Municipality of Izola (SI), who mentioned that an email had been sent to TSG3 members, that the presidency was informed that approval for this matter was required during the meeting and that the document (the template) was uploaded onto the Intranet. The Municipality of Izola (SI) also emphasized that if any further information about the documents was needed, members could send an email before the meeting, and the additional information would be provided. Requesting additional items during the meeting could disrupt the entire process. While

acknowledging that template containing the general scope of the session had been uploaded, Italy explained that being the matter an item under discussion during the TSG3 meeting, this was the most appropriate forum to discuss it and request any relevant information. Therefore, Italy reiterated its request.

The Croatian National coordinator asked if TSG 3 members can conditionally agree on the panellists. Italy said that they can agree on that.

Conclusions under Item 4:

C.4.: The members approved the title and conditionally the three panellists for the panel session. A document containing the short bios and presentations of the panellists will be distributed to all TSG 3 members. Upon receipt, TSG 3 members will provide their final agreement.

Item 5: Decision on the revision of the Action Plan

The Chair gave the floor to the European Commission (EC) to present the report on the Action Plan of Pillar 3. Ms. Helena Sundblad Schäfer, EC representative, emphasized the importance of the proceedings, especially considering the revision of the Action Plan particularly in light of the revision of the Action Plan requiring acceptance within the TSG 3 group, focusing on the environmental aspect, especially the indicators, which have been reworked. Before TSG3 meeting, the Italian delegation presented a new proposal for these indicators, that was used by Co-Chairs as a basis to develop a new updated proposal, which was circulated before the meeting started. She added that the aim is to reach a consensus, accepting all members' input on this new proposal of indicators for TSG 3's environmental aspect of the Action Plan. EC representative stressed that while the proposal may not be 100% finalized in its details, the crucial aspect is to agree on the concepts and main indicators. Any technical gaps can be addressed later; the primary goal is to agree on the proposal developed by Italy and reviewed and updated by the Pillar Coordinators. She expressed gratitude to all attendees, emphasizing the importance of reaching a decision during the meeting. Additionally, she added a comment on Albania's words at the beginning of the meeting, adding that unfortunately it's too late for any written inputs on Action Plan, as an agreement was supposed to be reached that day or at the latest next day. She continued by stating that while Albania could provide specific comments in writing later, it was imperative to establish fundamental agreement on that day. This urgency stemmed from the need to forward the text to the Governing Board for adoption, facilitating the submission of the revised Action Plan in its entirety to the European Commission by April 12th.

The Chair expressed gratitude to the European Commission for introducing the agenda item and proposed reviewing the comments received on Monday, April 8. He expressed confidence in TSG 3's progress and noted that there was still time until next day in case Albania had additional comments.

The Chair then asked TSG 3 members how to proceed with the revision of the Indicators. Italy suggested going through each indicator individually since agreement needed to be reached. Italy asked a confirmation on the inclusion of the two comments sent in January, discussed at the Governing Board, accepted and initially not incorporated in the document. The Chair gave the floor to Project partner Municipality of Izola (SI), who confirmed the acceptance of these comments in the latest version and assured that the desired text would be deleted.

For the first indicator, Italy proposed to modify its name to "Number of trans-boundary cooperation events in the field of MSP" instead of "Number of approved maritime spatial plans with priorities«. Indeed, Italy clarified that the reason for this change is that the maritime spatial plans (MSP) fall under national jurisdiction and are a separate process from EUSAIR activities. Italy further explained that they

had already drafted their plan which is awaiting approval from the national authority. Additionally, Italy proposed modifying the target value (from 8 to 6).

Croatia agreed with the change of the indicator, but noted that the baseline and have to be modified accordingly since the value reflects the no of countries from the previous indicator and proposed to write TBC. Italy added another comment regarding the »Data source«, suggesting that it should be linked to TSG 3 or TSG 3 questionnaire rather than to external experts.

The Chair thanked all for the comments and reminded all about the mandate of TSG 3. It was emphasized that TSG 3 is the sole pillar, that have in mandate to take care about the quality of environment in Adriatic Ionian region. The Chair underscored the importance of ensuring that economic activities do not compromise the ecological integrity of coastal and marine ecosystems. Proactivity was emphasized, highlighting the need for a more comprehensive approach beyond the national level, which is the added value of the EU Macro-Regional Strategy. The Chair stressed the necessity of utilizing existing data, engaging in national monitoring, and reporting to EU and other relevant institutions such as Barcelona Convention, MEDPOL program, and REMPEC to initiate the drafting of national MSPs. This approach ensures that necessary measures are taken to address situations beyond national borders, particularly in shared water bodies in the Adriatic. It was reiterated that this is the core purpose of TSG 3 and no other body is designated to address this issue. He added, that agreement on that means that this proposal should be very simple to implement. And this is something that he will do his best to very carefully monitor. He placed his trust in TSG 3 members to collectively deliver and assist countries and societies bordering the shared sea transparently and efficiently to minimize gaps, among the countries, among the sectors in transparent way. It was emphasized that the development of MSPs for the Adriatic and Ionian is a monumental endeavour, unprecedented in history, and should not be approached as routine business due to time constraints. Instead, ample time should be dedicated to discussions and deliberations, as this is the primary responsibility of TSG 3.

Italy expressed that their proposal aligns precisely with what the Chair had said, aiming to position TSG 3 as the primary data source. They emphasized that it is TSG 3's responsibility to deliver what is outlined in the indicators. Italy referenced the Chair's previous remarks, suggesting that the focus should be on TSG 3's ownership as a data source rather than linking to external MSP experts. This rationale underpins the proposal, as attributing the data source to TSG 3 aligns more closely with the group's responsibilities and tasks.

Croatia acknowledged the validity of the Chair's remarks and highlighted an issue regarding conservation, particularly in light of the global biodiversity target to increase protected areas. They emphasized the need to consider how to cooperate into these efforts. Croatia highlighted that events and conferences are organized precisely to initiate discussions on this matter. Croatia added that in the perfect word this would be the result indicator and we would have 100 % percent of Adriatic Ionian region covered in MSP that consider biodiversity objective. However, since this is also an output indicator it may to consider to include thematic events like mentioned previously. The question was posed regarding whether the discussion on this topic would take place during the meeting or if an explanatory document would be prepared, as done previously. Croatia emphasized the urgency of starting discussions on this topic and discussed how to implement conservation measures that everyone can agree on.

The Chair expressed gratitude for the comments, finding Italy and Croatia's contributions particularly encouraging. He noted that these comments would be included in the minutes and utilized for the next steps. The Chair thanked for consensus on the importance of discussing MSP indicator.

Croatia added, following the discussion, that as reported in action 3.1.1. one of the topics is to define priorities for new spatial protection of regional importance in contribution to global and EU targets for

biodiversity including identifying joint approach on the conservation measures with neighbouring countries. Therefore, this could be utilized as one of the themes for further consideration.

The Chair then asked for any other opinion. A question was raised by Italy regarding the process of making modifications and accepting revisions, indicator by indicator. It was emphasized that this is all that can be done at that moment, to ensure that the impacts are realized by the end of the day. Delaying these actions may result in having to revisit the process, creating additional work.

The Chair addressed the TSG 3 members and initiated a discussion on how to proceed, emphasizing that it is TSG 3's responsibility to address and resolve these issues as soon as possible. The Chair highlighted the considerable investment of time, energy, and knowledge made into these matters. Additionally, it was noted that during a previous meeting, a member of the EC praised the work done, stating that the plan of indicators developed by TSG 3 is one of the most precise ever seen in the implementation of Macro-Regional strategies. TSG 3's efforts resulted in a comprehensive document exceeding 50 pages, compared to the much shorter documents produced by other pillars. Concern was expressed about the disproportionate workload, with TSG 3 putting in significantly more effort compared to other pillars. It was emphasized that despite the enthusiasm, there is a need for common sense and equitable distribution of responsibilities, considering factors such as manpower and resources.

The Co-Chair reported that over the past 30 days, considerable effort has been dedicated to creating documents and defining indicators. Expert input was sought and welcomed from all willing participants. The Co-Chair expressed satisfaction with the revised document prepared and urged the group to strive for its acceptance following thorough discussion and explanation to all stakeholders. Delegates from other countries were invited to provide comments on the document. It was noted that Albania had no additional comments to offer, and their stance was confirmed. The Co-Chair expressed gratitude for Albania's support and emphasized the collective effort invested in the process. He also stressed the importance of discussion of any comments from other countries into the improved document and initiating discussions on each comment without delay. It was highlighted that the end of this phase of work is within reach, with the document poised to be a valuable asset for future endeavours.

The Representative of the EC echoed the sentiments expressed by previous speakers and commended TSG 3 for their thorough work, which is something to be proud of. She emphasized the need to reach practical conclusions and bring discussions to a close in a timely manner. She expressed support for the Italian proposal to correct the document incrementally, as it seemed to be the most practical solution given the constraints of time. She noted the difficulty in finding time for further corrections, circulation of the document, and obtaining agreement from all stakeholders within the available timeframe. She proposed that the group proceed to reach a consensus on the proposal made, indicator by indicator. She suggested updating the document in real-time as discussions progress, so that by the end of the day, a new revised action plan would be in place. She emphasized the urgency of the situation and stressed that she does not see any alternative approach given the time constraints.

Italy thanked the EC and said that the question Italy raised was easier and clarified that the proposal to make modifications to the document immediately, one by one, was aimed to save time avoiding further discussion and possible re-exchange of the document.

Croatia said the task only seemed difficult, but it could be accomplished quickly. It was suggested to create a clean version to be ready for the next day. It was suggested to put the baseline for the indicators as 0 and the target value as TBD, with the data source being the TSG 3 questionnaire or TSG 3.

The Chair thanked Croatia and Italy. The meeting proceeded with modification of indicators one by one, with additional explanation where needed.

The list of indicators was adopted. Although the list of indicators has been adopted, it was decided that technical gaps will be addressed later to further define and detail indicators.

Conclusions under Item 5:

C.5.: The list of indicators was adopted and the Action Plan was revised and agreed on.

Item 6: Recap of activities of TSG3 coordinators from the last meeting

6.1 Recap of Technical Meeting of EUSAIR Pillar Coordinators, 21th February, Zagreb, Croatia

The Co-Chair presented the results of the EUSAIR Pillar Coordinators Technical Meeting held in Zagreb (CRO) on 21 February 2024.

TSG3 took advantage of the fact that TSG3 coordinator is also a chair of Barcelona convention and work that was done in terms of synergies between BC and EUSAIR was included in the official documents thus giving international recognition of the Macro-Regional strategies.

Italy recalled a point raised during the previous TSG3 meeting in November concerning the similar presentation. They emphasized that while activities and contributions related to COP 23, when undertaken by TSG 3, should be included as part of TSG 3's activities, the COP 23 and the Portorož Declaration themselves should not be presented as activities of TSG 3. Italy suggested being more specific about EUSAIR's involvement in future presentations.

The chair noted that efforts were made to demonstrate synergies between regional and sub-regional activities, emphasizing the main goal of TSG 3 to enhance the quality of the environment in the Adriatic-Ionian region. The coordination between EU and UN processes was highlighted as a comprehensive approach to address common issues. It was emphasized that official documents, including decisions from COP 23 and the Portorož Declaration, state that synergies between the implementation of the Barcelona Convention and the EUSAIR are welcomed and appreciated. Inter-regional cooperation, as agreed upon in Portorož, was highlighted as a means to reduce pressure and impacts on coastal and marine ecosystems. The point was made that the purpose of reporting back on these achievements is to inform the Adriatic-Ionian countries of progress made.

Italy acknowledged the importance of synergies, the outcomes of the COP, and the remarkable work that has been done. However, a concern with communication was raised. Indeed, while it was acknowledged that there are synergies and connections between various events, the item under discussion is about activities carried out by TSG3 over a specific period of time. Therefore, in the presentation of TSG3 activities, confusion should be avoided by not listing the Portorož Declaration and the COP of the Barcelona Convention as TSG3 separate technical activities.

The Chair noted that the Governing Board emphasized that TSGs should promote their activities on all levels to enhance the visibility of EUSAIR. This task was assigned to all TSGs. It was clarified that TSG3 made efforts to promote its activities at both regional and sub-regional levels. Additionally, it was noted that the European Commission urged the coordinators, to enhance visibility at the non-EU regional level regarding the importance of the Adriatic Ionian strategy.

The Co-Chair expressed full support for Chairs statements. It was noted that significant effort had been invested in preparing documents for the COP23, and that activities supporting the protected Adriatic and Ionian Sea, falling under the Barcelona Convention, were being undertaken, establishing a strong connection with the Secretariat of the Barcelona Convention.

The Co-Chair explained the importance of highlighting the significance of activities connecting EUSAIR and the Barcelona Convention and that due to time constraints, many other activities could not be

mentioned. For example, during the governing board meeting, TSG 2, led by Mr. Sergio Gariba, proposed important activities relevant to both TSG 2 and TSG 3. Regarding communication misunderstandings, it was suggested that roles within TSG 3, including those of Co-Chairs and members, needed clarification. There was a call for defining who could speak on behalf of TSG 3, take action, and where the jurisdiction lay. It was proposed that this matter be discussed and defined by the governing board, as some steps in this direction were attempted during the last GB meeting.

Montenegro emphasized that it's important, that certain activities like the Barcelona Convention and COP should be documented, especially in discussions about coordination, cooperation, and promotion of collective efforts.

Italy clarified that the issue isn't about whether it should be written, but rather how it should be written to reflect TSG 3 achievements and efforts. The concern raised was that the technical report of TSG3's activities may lead to miscommunication. Italy pointed out that the slide portrayed the Barcelona Convention and Portorož declaration as TSG3 activities rather than contexts and instruments in/to which EUSAIR collaborated.

Croatia asked to include to the minutes or other reports two conferences, one organized by Croatian presidency in November 2023 »Conference on the protection of waters and seas from plastics and micro-plastics pollution« and the upcoming conference in Zadar »Conference on the implementation of the 2030 EU Biodiversity Strategy in the Adriatic Sea through joint solutions for nature and fisheries«.

It was clarified that the first conference will be added, and that the second mentioned was already recorded in Activity plan of possible TSG 3 events for 2024.

Item 7: Conclusions and next steps of Day 1

After the point 6.1 the Chair closed the meeting. The meeting continued the next day

Item 6 (sequel on day 2): Recap of activities of TSG3 coordinators from the last meeting

The Chair verified the attendance and confirmed that the quorum was established on the 2nd day of the meeting.

6.2 Recap of the Governing Board, 21th – 22th February, Zagreb, Croatia

This item was presented by the EUSAIR Facility Point Lead Partner. They gave a Recap of GB taking place from 21-22 February 2024 in Zagreb, Croatia. The Croatian presidency's program for the forum was presented, and it was said that registration for the sessions in Šibenik was open. Regarding the Revised EUSAIR Action Plan, it was said that the input document was approved by the governing board, except for certain sections of Pillar 2 and indicators of Pillar 3. Lead Partner informed TSG 3 members that Croatia and Bosnia and Herzegovina were approved as coordinators of Pillar 5, allowing their activities to proceed with financial support. Additionally, it was presented that issues in the governance architecture paper led to further comments and adjustments. It was still being fine-tuned with the aim of approval during the Croatian presidency. Though not approved during the meeting, a successful follow-up written procedure led to approval of the concept paper for the Youth Council. Information on 1st ADRION programme call and status of governance support project contracts were given. Services were already available in many countries despite contract delays. Routine reports were given on the technical meeting of Pillar Coordinators and Committee of Senior Officials with no significant updates. Last but not least, the Croatian presidency outlined plans for EUSAIR's involvement in the consultation for the post-2027 cohesion policy. The European Commission requested consultations to be organized within Interreg programs and Macro-Regional strategies to gather inputs for the

preparation of the 2027 plus cohesion policy. The Governing Board mandated EUSAIR Governing Point Projects to contribute to this consultation.

Since there were no questions, the Chair continued with the next item on the agenda.

6.3 Recap of the conference Biodiversity and Marine Protection in EUSAIR: A Contribution to EU Biodiversity Strategy 2030, 14 March 2024, Brussels, Belgium

The Chair provided an overview of TSG 3's progress over the past five years, particularly focusing on implementing activities related to marine protected areas in line with European policies and the biodiversity strategy. Emphasizing the importance of measures related to marine protection and coastal areas in advancing climate change adaptation, TSG 3 presented these activities at a conference in Brussels, to a broad audience, including representatives from DG Environment, and DG REGIO, that gave encouraging words for TSG 3 achievements and follow-up. The Chair added, that following the presentation, discussions were held with the European Commission, focusing on TSG 3's indicators and pragmatic approach to implementing the new Action Plan. It was highlighted that the attendees, provided encouraging feedback on TSG 3's achievements and future plans, especially regarding TSG 3's contributions to the sustainable blue economy. As a result, the Coordinator received a personal invitation to a meeting in Athens on 7th June, where the European Commission will discuss the importance of a sustainable blue economy in the context of climate change transition. The presentation aimed to establish effective communication about TSG 3's work across sectors, stressing the importance of protected areas in preserving ecosystem services and ensuring water, climate, and biodiversity security.

Italy raised a question regarding presented document, when mentioned legal basis and Scenario.

The Chair gave the floor to Project partner Municipality of Izola (SI), who clarified that all the presentations were added to the internet, and that the study wasn't presented at the event.

Italy raised another question about the uploaded "Scenario" document and its corresponding PowerPoint presentation, referring to the conclusion made on this matter during the last TSG 3 meeting concerning the decision to complete the document with two final slides. Italy wanted to ensure that the conclusion had been followed.

The Chair gave the floor to Project partner Municipality of Izola (SI), who clarified that the document has been finalized after the mentioned conclusion, that it is already uploaded on the conference website.

Italy requested the Coordinators to share the document in order to keep track of the updated content and FP Project partner Municipality of Izola (SI) ensured that the link to the document would be sent again.

Conclusions under Item 6:

C.6.: The members were informed about Technical Meeting of EUSAIR Pillar Coordinators, 21th February, Zagreb, Croatia, the Governing Board, 21th – 22th February, Zagreb, Croatia and the conference Biodiversity and Marine Protection in EUSAIR: A Contribution to EU Biodiversity Strategy 2030, 14 March 2024, Brussels, Belgium.

Item 8: Report on state of the art and inputs from TSG 3 members on transformation of project concepts into bankable projects

Project partner Municipality of Izola (SI), presented the Item 8. It was clarified that the agenda item was raised due to observation from the representatives of Italy during the GB about the fact that TSG 3 haven't approved one of the listed project (COSFI-MAR) In response, all Annex 1 and Annex 2 documents for all projects were republished online to clarify the status of TSG 3 project development. The roadmap of the process of development of EUSAIR Facility Point strategic project development and financial dialogues was presented. It was reminded that TSG 3 had approved four flagships: ICZM and MSP, PETHABECO, 3MSP, and ASOSCOP. Additionally, TSG3 approved FOREST READAPT + SEC-DIV-CONIFERS, which was a result of merging two similar projects, and the projects Bio-Shelters, and COSFI-MAR, which was already developed at the stage of project proposal, and was merged between S.H.A.R.K and EMAAIR project proposals.

It was mentioned that the interpillar project AdroNet, was underdeveloped in collaboration with pillar 4. The project was recognized by TSG3 members as too tourism-oriented during a previous meeting. It was decided that the project needed to be slightly redefined with a focus on environmental aspects. If this adjustment is made, it would be acceptable. Otherwise, AdroNet would become a TSG 4 monopillar project. An email was sent to the coordinators of TSG4, informing them of this decision. Furthermore, the interpillar project involving TSG3 and TSG1, focusing on cross-pillar Integrated ICZM and MSP, was approved.

Italy said, that they thought that the COSFI –MAR project was a whole new project to be approved, but after the clarification it was clear that it was not.

After the presentation there was a common acknowledgment about the fact that projects COSFI-MAR, FOREST READAPT + SEC-DIV-CONIFERS, BIO SHELTERS and CROSPILLAR ICZM&MSP are approved projects. Croatia raised a question about whether TSG1 is involved in any way in the COSFI-MAR project, as the project focus on sustainable fishing practices, Croatia believe TSG 1 should be involved. Additionally, a clarification was sought on which countries still permit the use of dynamite in fishing activities, as it was specifically mentioned in the documentation. If dynamite fishing is still legal in any country, it should not be mentioned.

The Chair gave the floor to Project partner Municipality of Izola (SI), who clarified that the project was not classified as inter-pillar project, so the project proceeded like monopillar. As the project is closed, it's impossible to reopen it to do some modifications. It was noted that the expert who developed the project mentioned that there are still countries where the use of dynamite is a method of fishing.

SP4EUSAIR project coordinator, Mr Lovre Karamarko pointed out that they've been analysing project proposals from pillars and TSGs, distinguishing between mature and developing ones. They're assessing them to identify the most mature projects and the new ones. The new projects will depend on each pillar, determining which proposals will be put forward. Additionally, they noted the absence of a before presented table from the internet, only finding post-proposal clarifications published under the TSG3 meetings. He also mentioned their upcoming tasks, which involve scrutinizing the current state of play and subcontracting experts. These experts will analyse proposed projects to determine which ones are feasible and bankable. He highlighted the importance of the upcoming workshop for Pillar coordinators and TSG 3 members. During this workshop, they will analyse project proposals and needs with the help of experts to develop a roadmap and action plan. They will take into account the needs and expectations of all parties involved, revising proposals as needed.

The Chair gave the floor to Project partner Municipality of Izola (SI), who mentioned that TSG3 will likely have proposals for future flagships, possibly including topics like climate adaptation and resilience. These topics were discussed at the last forum in Sarajevo. However, they are still subject to discussion within TSG3. It was highlighted the importance of further inputs from TSG3 members regarding interesting topics and potential projects. There will likely be a procedure at the TSG3 level for approval and development of these projects. Ultimately it was underline that, the TSG3 members will decide on the most appropriate projects to develop. It was suggested that a dedicated topic be

added to the agenda for the November/October meeting, subject to the agreement of the coordinators and members.

SP4EUSAIR project coordinator, Mr Lovre Karamarko underline the importance of staying informed and actively participating in the evolving process. He assured that his team will be in contact, ready to address any questions or inquiries that may arise.

The Chair thanked the SP4EUSAIR project coordinator for the presentation. It was noted that the table is tasked with developing ideas and utilizing assistance to further develop the project if possible. This is the process discussed, which is currently underway. It was emphasized that it's up to the TSG 3 members to discuss this seriously, focusing on reaching consensus on priority issues and deciding on projects. The discussion centred on how past ideas have developed into mature projects, with others being pushed into implementation. Members were encouraged to maintain contact with national coordinators and facility points to understand the state of affairs, including details discussed during the meeting. The meeting concluded with the approval of project acronyms: COSFI-MAR, CROSSPILLAR ICZM&MSP, Bio-Shelters, and FOREST READAPT + SEC-DIV-CONIFERS.

Italy additionally requested the removal of the phrase 'Document to be presented and approved' from the current item on the agenda, with the justification that, otherwise, when reviewing the meeting outcome, it might seem that TSG3 members approved updated documents concerning projects that are already approved.

The Chair assured that the request would be granted.

Conclusion under Item 8:

C.8: The projects “Towards the long-term in-situ conservation, sustainable fisheries and improving the marine environments in the Adriatic-Ionian region”, with the acronym COSFI-MAR, »Using high quality research to strengthen dialogues and institutional capacities for effective implementation of MSP/ICZM in support of inclusive and sustainable growth in the AIR”, with the acronym CROSSPILLAR ICZM&MSP, “Botanical Gardens as Biodiversity Shelters and Nurseries”, with the acronym Bio-Shelters and “Renewal of the adaptation of coppice forests in a drastically changing environment + Secure diversity through a holistic approach for the most threatened Mediterranean conifer ecosystems: combining genetic, physiology, biodiversity indexes, germination and restoration”, with the acronym FOREST READAPT + SEC-DIV-CONIFERS, were discussed and agreed on that the further work of the projects should be done with the mentioned names and acronyms.

Item 9: Activity plan of possible TSG 3 events for 2024 - updating the TSG 3 Activity plan 2024

The Item was presented by Project Partner EUSAIR Facility Point from Izola. They went through the list of events by naming each one and stating when and where each event would take place. Italy proposed to do a cross-check with other pillars on how they filled the activity plan, to see if they feel the activity plans with strict TSG3 activities or also the TSG3 related activities.

The Chair gave the floor to Project partner Municipality of Izola (SI), who clarified that the document is already in line, as the Lead Partner collects these documents for each pillar to compile into one, following the same formula for every pillar.

Croatia invited all the members to the upcoming Conference on the implementation of Biodiversity Strategy in the Adriatic Sea through joint solutions for nature and fisheries in Zadar 23. April 2024, which will nicely build on the conference done in Brussels.

The floor was given to Facility Point Project Partner from Croatia, who kindly asked for the conformation of the panellists for TSG 3 panel session, so the organization of travel and accommodation can proceed.

The activity plan for TSG 3 events for 2024 was agreed on.

Conclusions under Item 9:

C.9: The activity plan for potential TSG3 events in 2024 has been presented and agreed on.

Before proceeding with Item 10, the Chair reminded everyone that it had been decided the day before that the Action Plan would be presented again if necessary, and clarified that the mail with the clear updated version of the Action plan was sent in the morning to all TSG 3 members.

Croatia asked if it is possible to receive a follow-up on the next steps to the action plan, as there are still many things to decide and agree on. She was not referring to the formal adoption of the Action Plan but the work among TSG 3, to decide upon open data.

The representative of the EUSAIR Facility Point Lead Partner explained the formal addition procedure. It was explained that once the action plan is submitted to the Commission, it serves as an input document and doesn't immediately become the official action plan. Instead, the Commission prepares a working document, similar to past action plans, with the help of an external expert. There is uncertainty about how the Commission will interact with Pillar coordinators after submission, as well as conflicting information regarding this process. After submission, there won't be extensive consultation to avoid prolonging the process indefinitely. The Commission may streamline the document, but the core elements of the actions, flagships, and indicators will remain the same. It was noted that that target values for indicators can be adjusted or new indicators added, as needed. Currently, there is no monitoring and evaluation expert in place due to the transition between projects. Greek partners will collaborate with thematic experts to further define and detail indicators, involving all TSGs. This process will be overseen by the Greek partner in the Facility Point project. No additional explanatory document will be provided.

The Chair expressed gratitude for the clear presentation of the process, emphasizing the importance of receiving relevant information directly from Lead Partner representatives. They thanked the presenter and concluded the agenda item.

Item 10: AOB

Greece provided an update on the upcoming presidency of the EUSAIR, stating that priorities and schedules are still being developed. The possibility of hosting one of the TSG 3 meetings in Athens was mentioned, tentatively scheduled for April or May of 2025, pending financial clarification. Additionally, the information of a planned kick-off conference in September 2024, was delivered for at a location yet to be determined. The conference will introduce the priorities and schedule of the Greek Presidency. All countries and stakeholders are invited, with efforts made to avoid overlapping with the Macro-Regional Strategies Week in September.

Italy reiterated the request to update email addresses, noting that some members' emails are incorrect. They requested a document to circulate among TSG 3 members for this purpose. Additionally, they inquired about whether the Facility Point projects will have funds to ensure TSG3 members on-site participation.

Representative from Facility Point Lead partner explained that all partners are expected to cover travel and accommodation costs for members attending meetings. However, some partners are waiting for the signature of subsidy contract from the program before initiating procurement. It was noted that

for Italian partners like Friuli-Venezia Giulia, it's impossible to start procurement until the subsidy contract is signed. This is due to Italian legislation. It was added that in most countries, partners can already cover these costs for TSG members and that TSG 3 members should contact Friuli-Venezia Giulia directly for further information.

Italian member Ms Olga Sedioli expressed her inability to participate in person due to the lack of coverage for travel expenses. She noted that she contacted the Friuli-Venezia Giulia and that it was said that there's insufficient budget to cover travel expenses for all TSG members. She expressed concern about their ability to participate in person in future events, which she finds worrying.

Representative from Facility Point Lead partner regret for the situation, acknowledging it as a consequence of dividing projects. It was assured that the concerns were taken seriously and hoped for a solution. Regarding the reduced funds in the new period, efforts were made to secure more funds, but with limited success. Funding for the facility point is now spread across three projects for four years. FP Project Partners are responsible for dividing and distributing costs over the years. Initially, spending will be cautious, with more flexibility if additional funds become available later. This reality was noted as a potential problem.

The Chair thanked Olga for her input, assuring that her concerns were taken seriously. He expressed hope that decision-makers at the management level would address the issue and emphasized that having experts attend on-site meetings is important for the quality of work. The Chair called for this message to be conveyed to the GB, the EC, and all partners.

Conclusions under Item 10:

C.10: The members were informed about Greece's preparation for the upcoming EUSAIR presidency and potential schedule matters.

C.11: The mailing list of standing members should be updated. A Document file should be circulated and among the TSG3 members in order to be updated with the accurate TSG3 members' information.

C.12: A concern was raised about the coverage for travel expenses, potentially impacting the ability of members to participate in on-site meetings and events. Therefore, it was decided to discuss the issue in the frame of the Governing Board.

Item 11: Conclusions and next steps

The Chair emphasized the consensus achieved on indicators, which was a significant process over the last few months. He added that the mission for the next few weeks is completed, and the focus now shifts to the follow-up in Šibenik. He expressed anticipation for the end celebration of the Croatian presidency within the EUSAIR Forum.

The Chair thanked everyone who participated and Croatia, once again, for the hospitality, wishing everyone the best and looking forward to the upcoming events. The Chair concluded the meeting.