

# LAUNCH CONFERENCE OF THE EU STRATEGY FOR THE ADRIATIC AND IONIAN REGION 18 NOVEMBER 2014, BRUSSELS, BELGIUM



## Conference Report

A high-level conference in Brussels, on 18 November 2014, launched the EU Strategy for the Adriatic and Ionian Region (EUSAIR), the third EU macro-regional strategy after the EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region and the EU Strategy for the Danube Region. The conference was organised by the Italian Presidency of the Council of the European Union, in cooperation with the European Commission and together with the Adriatic and Ionian Initiative and the Italian Marche Region - in its capacity of Chair of the EU Committee of the Regions' Adriatic-Ionian Interregional Group.

Around 500 participants attended, including national and regional authorities responsible for the EUSAIR and the management of EU funds, EU institutions, and other stakeholders and press. Key speakers in the conference were the Ministers of Foreign Affairs or their deputies of the eight participating countries (four EU Member States - Croatia, Greece, Italy and Slovenia, three candidate countries - Albania, Montenegro and Serbia, and one potential candidate country - Bosnia Herzegovina), alongside Commissioner for Regional Policy, **Corina Crețu**, and Commissioner for Environment, Maritime Affairs and Fisheries, **Karmenu Vella**.

Proceedings started with an opening speech from **Paolo Gentiloni**, Italian Minister of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation. He announced the adoption of a Joint Statement (cf. Annex) in which the eight governmental representatives expressed their commitment to move without delay to the implementation phase of the Strategy. This also underlined that, for the Strategy to have a real impact and to deliver practical results for the benefit of the more than 70 million people who live and work in the Region, a multi-level governance and management system, based on strong political leadership and decision-making as well clear organisation of work, is required (see Joint Statement and Governance paper attached).

After keynote speeches given by the two Commissioners - where they reiterated the two core objectives of the Strategy: promotion of growth and jobs and support to EU integration - the Ministers engaged in a panel debate moderated by Professor **Trvtko Jakovina**. For **Zlatko Lagumdžija** (Bosnia Herzegovina) it was important to consolidate and coordinate the many initiatives that already exist, using also the country-specific IPA-funds. Priorities for his country were connectivity (Sarajevo-Belgrade corridor), environment and energy, education/capacity building with an emphasis on promoting shared values and demonstrating the peoples of the Region were not segregated. **Hrvoje Marušić** (Croatia) described the Strategy as embarking on a great adventure, with the Region acting as a bridge between Central Europe and the Mediterranean. Since the Western Balkans are still a blank space in terms of TEN-T and TEN-E, top priorities for Croatia were the motorway from Zagreb to Patras, as well as energy networks. For **Sokol Dervishaj** (Albania) the overall vision should be, drawing lessons from past mistakes, to pass on a spirit of cooperation to the next generation. **Igor Lukšić** (Montenegro) said the Strategy was a mutual learning process. In addition to integration in the EU, priorities for Montenegro included administrative reforms to ensure consistency between national, macro-regional and EU goals and filling the void

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presented by the Western Balkans. **Dimitris Kourkoulas** (Greece) said priorities for his country included harnessing the unexploited potential of tourism, notably through reviewing the Schengen visa requirement, as well as promoting the energy union via interconnected supply of gas. He stressed cooperation should not only take place at the national but also at the regional and local levels. **Ivica Dašić** (Serbia) underlined their commitment to invest maximum efforts in the Strategy, which would help greatly in making up for the country's lack of access to the sea. **Dragoljuba Benčina** (Slovenia), referred to experience from the past initiative of ADRI-ALP as being helpful when looking for synergies between the three macro-regional strategies for respectively the Alpine, the Danube and the Adriatic and Ionian Regions. She pointed to the experience of the EU Strategy for the Danube Region in relation to ways of involving civil society. **Paolo Gentiloni** underlined the political added-value of the Strategy, reflected in the participation of 4 EU Countries and 4 non-EU countries, thus stimulating the European path of UE candidates and potential candidates.

The representatives of other EU institutions emphasised the importance of stakeholder involvement and of ensuring adequate funding to this end. MEP **Ivan Jakovčić** said a European Parliament Inter-group for the Adriatic and Ionian Region was in the making, along with a report expected for end of 2015 with concrete proposals on funding possibilities. **Stefano Palmieri** (European Economic and Social Committee) advocated a permanent Adriatic-Ionian Forum for civil society and social partners, as well as for a transnational platform for SMEs, R&D for marketing and smart specialisation. For **Gian Mario Spacca** (President of Marche Region and Chair of the Adriatic-Ionian Interregional Group at the Committee of the Regions) the particular value of the macro-regional approach lay in its combination of grassroots involvement and impulses from the top, and the capacity of a macro-regional label to leverage funding.

A Press Conference, attended by Minister Gentiloni and the two European Commissioners, closed the morning session.

The afternoon saw a technical plenary, chaired by **Lena Andersson Pench** and moderated by **Nathalie Verschelde** (both from Directorate General for Regional and Urban Policy, European Commission). This gave rise to a dynamic discussion between a panel of eight EUSAIR National Coordinators and the audience. National Coordinators underlined, among others, the importance of attracting the attention of the key decision makers for the necessary resources and called for clear guidance on how best to gain access to funding. This will form a basis for discussions in the first formal meeting of the EUSAIR Governing Board at the end of January 2015.

More information is available in the new EUSAIR website: [www.adriatic-ionic.eu](http://www.adriatic-ionic.eu).

**ANNEX:** Joint Statement on a governance and management system for the implementation of the EU Strategy for the Adriatic and Ionian Region