



EU Strategy
for the Adriatic
and Ionian Region
EUSAIR

3rd FORUM of the EU Strategy for the Adriatic and Ionian Region

Adriatic and Ionian Council/EUSAIR Ministerial Meeting

CATANIA Declaration

24 May 2018

We, the Representatives of the Governments of Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Greece, Italy, Montenegro, Serbia and Slovenia, meeting in Catania, with the participation of a representative of the **European Commission**, in the framework of the 3rd Forum of the European Union Strategy for the Adriatic and Ionian Region:

GUIDED by the Ancona Declaration of 20 May 2000 and its basic principles, as well as by the principles expressed by the consecutive Adriatic and Ionian Council (AIC) declarations from 2001 to 2015 and by the joint AIC/EUSAIR Ministerial Declarations of 2016 and 2017 from Dubrovnik and Ioannina;

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 the EUSAIR, on the basis of the Commission's Communication of 17 June 2014 and **ACKNOWLEDGING** that the experience of more than a decade of the AII cooperation among Governments had benefitted the Strategy;

IN LINE with the decision adopted in Zagreb in October 2015 by the Adriatic and Ionian Initiative (AII) Committee of Senior Officials (CSO), welcomed by the EUSAIR Governing Board, to convene a single common Ministerial meeting of the AIC/EUSAIR to be held, generally, in the framework of the EUSAIR Fora;

TAKING INTO CONSIDERATION the European Parliament resolution of 16 January 2018 on the implementation of EU macro-regional strategies, which stresses the invaluable and innovative contribution of macro-regional strategies to cross-border, cross-sectorial and multi-level cooperation in Europe, emphasises the importance of sufficient human resources and administrative capacity in order to ensure that the political commitment translates into effective implementation of the strategies and, with regard to the EUSAIR, call on the participating countries to provide the competent authorities with support and tailored measures to implement the strategy;

RECALLING the “Opinion of the European Committee of the Regions on the implementation of macro-regional strategies”, adopted at the plenary session of 30 November and 1 December 2017, which points out that macro-regional strategies are a crucial element in the achievement of the EU strategic objectives and are a critical part of the EU multi-level governance architecture, and, with reference to the EUSAIR, believes that the gap between political statements and the means available for implementation should be bridged;

TAKING INTO CONSIDERATION the important contribution provided by the Adriatic Ionian Initiative and the EUSAIR to the progressive strengthening of the regional cooperation dimension and their remarkable role in fostering the collaboration among Adriatic Ionian partners in sectors of pivotal importance for the future of the Region;

CONVINCED that the multilevel governance system applied to the EUSAIR, the actions and projects implementing the Strategy in its four Pillars, as well as regional cooperation within the Adriatic and Ionian Initiative, are having and will continue to have a positive impact on the process of EU integration of the Candidate and Potential Candidate Countries in the Adriatic and Ionian Region;

CONSIDERING that it is high time to open a comprehensive discussion among participating countries on the future of the EUSAIR, in connection with the 2021-2027 EU Cohesion Policy and its programming, in terms of the functioning of multilevel governance, of funding, of the implementation of the EUSAIR Action plan, on monitoring and evaluating results achieved.

ACKNOWLEDGING the progress made in the implementation of the EUSAIR and in identifying processes and projects which contribute to its objectives;

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1. **SUSTAIN** a strong EU Cohesion Policy and a reinforced support in the new programming period 2021-2027 to the EUSAIR, including instruments such as maritime and hinterland cross-border cooperation programmes;

2. **ACCEPT** the request put forward by the Government of the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia to become the ninth Participating Country of the Adriatic and Ionian Initiative and **INVITE** the Council of the European Union and the European Commission to undertake all necessary steps to include the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia in the EU Strategy for the Adriatic and Ionian Region
3. **REITERATE** the complementarity of the Strategy with other macro-regional Strategies and inclusive regional initiatives and processes, including the renewed strategy for the Western Balkans¹. Challenges deriving from migration and refugees are among important issues for further thematic cooperation;
4. **CALL** on national authorities for mapping coherence frameworks of public investment and all ESIF and IPA co-funded programmes with the EUSAIR priorities and objectives;
5. **RECALL** the need to invest in “public goods” and overcome market failures and **CALL** on the relevant authorities to provide adequate overall financial and technical support to this purpose, also by improving pooling capacities of ESIF system of funding with other international/regional/national financial instruments;
6. **CALL** on the national and regional authorities responsible for the ESI and IPA funds in our countries to closely coordinate among them across the Region, since the very early stages of 2021-2027 strategic planning, so as to jointly agree on the macro-regional priorities to be included in the ESIF Partnership Agreements and IPA Strategy Papers and, subsequently, in the ensuing, relevant programming documents. In that respect, **URGE** the ESIF and IPA programme authorities and the EUSAIR key implementers to jointly work to identify at the earliest convenience pilot macro-regional actions and projects which require, for their implementation, a coordinated planning and programming of national/regional ESI and IPA funds across the Region.
7. **RECALL** the need for establishment during the new Programming period 2021-2027 of a dedicated Territorial Cooperation Programme with substantial and balanced financial resources (ERDF-IPA) to have the same geographical coverage as EUSAIR and aligned to it;
8. **REITERATE** our commitment to make all necessary efforts provided by the regulations so that the remaining 2014-2020 ESI and IPA funds, the latter in cooperation with the Commission, in our respective countries effectively contribute to achieving the EUSAIR objectives; **CALL** on the European Commission to ensure, where appropriate, that directly managed EU programmes take due account of the Strategy, notably by designing calls and actions so as to support the implementation of the EUSAIR;

¹ A credible enlargement perspective for and enhanced EU engagement with the Western Balkans (6 February 2018)

9. **RECALL** the need for a more pro-active role of participating countries in the governance of the EUSAIR and multiplication of efforts to accelerate implementation of the Strategy Action Plan
10. **ENCOURAGE** the participating Countries to improve the internal (national) coordination of the implementation process of the EUSAIR within the national Administrations, through establishment and empowerment of “National EUSAIR Committees” or similar, with due political support and high level representation from the countries' administration;
11. **REAFFIRM** our strong political commitment towards the implementation of the EUSAIR and **ENGAGE** to translate this commitment into concrete measures aiming at:
 - a) Enhancing effective ownership of the Strategy by Participating Countries;
 - b) Reinforcing the leading and monitoring role of Governing Board on Thematic Steering Groups;
 - c) Strengthening the capacity of the Strategy's key implementers (National and Pillar Coordinators, members of the Thematic Steering Groups) by securing that sufficient resources – financial, administrative, technical – are allocated, and competent staff are made available and duly empowered;
 - d) Ensuring aligned and coherent positions in support of the Strategy in the monitoring committees of relevant Interreg programmes through national consultation;
12. **ASK** for a report at each annual EUSAIR ministerial meeting on the development of the macro-regional Strategy and the functioning of its governance;
13. **TAKE NOTE** with satisfaction that the contractual requirements, needed for the “EUSAIR Facility Point” to be operational and support the EUSAIR governance structures, are now in place, **COMMIT** to ensure that national Facility Point Project Partners in our respective countries become fully operational without further delay;
14. **ACKNOWLEDGE** the importance of contacts with secretariats of regional organisations, programmes and initiatives as well as other institutions in order to exchange information on activities and best practices, and **STRESS** that coordination with other macro-regional strategies is essential for taking advantage of synergies, exchanging experience and know-how, ensuring prompt responses and increased visibility;
15. **SUPPORT** the efforts of the Adriatic and Ionian Initiative, acting as the political anchorage of the EUSAIR, to fine-tune its activities and structures in order to increasingly contribute to the goals of the EUSAIR and **ENCOURAGE** the AII to make efficient use of its overhauled Round Tables in order to effectively connect AII and EUSAIR;

16. **WELCOME** the initiative of the AII to organise, under the Italian Chairmanship, the first meeting of the AII Ombudspersons in Ancona, to discuss the issue of unaccompanied minors in the framework of the focus that participating countries pay to the issues related to migration and to outlining concrete avenues for action to help strengthen the resilience in the Adriatic Ionian region;
17. **ENCOURAGE** AII and EUSAIR governance structures to actively involve all stakeholders from the Adriatic and Ionian Region in the implementation of the Strategy, in the belief that their instruments (overhauled AII Round Tables, EUSAIR Facility Point and Stakeholders Platform), will facilitate a sustained dialogue between EUSAIR governance structures and civil society at large;
18. **NOTE** with satisfaction that, thanks to the longstanding cooperation among governments and national parliaments with the support of the AII, networks and Fora of Cities, Chambers of Commerce, Universities and Regions have pooled their forces and competences in order to work together for the implementation of the EUSAIR;
19. **ENCOURAGE** enhancing the principle of subsidiarity within both the AII and the EUSAIR by establishing working links with the EUSAIR Stakeholders Platform;
20. **TAKE NOTE** with satisfaction of the approval of the Annual Report of activities of the Permanent Secretariat of the AII by the Committee of Senior Officials;
21. **THANK** the Italian national, regional and local authorities - sole financiers of the AII PS - for the funds they continue to allocate for the functioning of the AII Permanent Secretariat;
22. **COMMEND** the AII Permanent Secretariat for its efforts aimed at maintaining strong links with the Adriatic and Ionian Fora of civil societies' organizations, convinced that civil society gives added value to the EUSAIR delivering tangible and beneficial results;
23. **COMMEND** the Italian Republic for the efforts made during the year of AII Chairmanship in promoting regional cooperation and in paving the way for a profitable use of the overhauled Round Tables and their connections with the EUSAIR Thematic Steering Groups;
24. **EXPRESS** appreciation of the European Commission's continued and decisive support in providing strategic coordination of the EUSAIR, in line with the Conclusions of the GAC of 29 September 2014, **CALL** on the Commission to ensure that the Strategy is taken into account in all relevant EU policies and programme planning;
25. **THANK** the Italian Government and the City of Catania for the excellent organisation and hospitality offered on the occasion of the 3rd EUSAIR Forum and the Adriatic and Ionian Council/EUSAIR Ministerial meeting;

26. **ENTRUST** the incoming AII and EUSAIR Chairmanship from 1 June 2018 to 31 May 2019 to Montenegro, inviting it to use all instruments at its disposal to facilitate actions and projects for implementing the EUSAIR so as to lead all countries of the region into a period of sustainable growth and prosperity.