

EUSAIR Slovene Presidency 20-21

Final Report



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EUSAIR
Slovenian Presidency 20–21

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It's easier to sail when we're all aboard the flagships!

The year of the Slovene Presidency started successfully – with the Governing Board adopting the EUSAIR flagship projects for the period 2021-2027.

It was crucial that all stakeholders jointly agreed 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. This goal, already set within the Catania Declaration of 2018, has finally been achieved: after two years of intensive work in the EUSAIR governance structure, and in particular in thematic steering groups, the final list of the Macro-regional priorities was adopted at the online Extraordinary Covid-19 12th EUSAIR Governing Board meeting on 10 June 2020.

The Slovene Minister of Foreign Affairs, Anže Logar, and Minister for Development and the EU Cohesion Policy, Zvone Černač, informed their colleagues in all EUSAIR countries, as well as the European commissioners, about the extensive list of projects, underlining that *“jointly agreed Macro-regional priority actions are among those undertakings in which we should spare no effort in order to ensure political, economic, legal and financial convergence, despite the current crisis”*.

The 6th EUSAIR Forum concluded the year of the Slovene Presidency with clear recognition of the importance of **embedding these flagships projects**. The process of **monitoring** was also explicitly mentioned in the Izola Declaration, making it a durable legacy of this year. Together with the recognition of **Green Connectivity** as a *»transversal component of all pillars in order to contribute to Europe's green recovery and green future«*, special attention of the Slovene Presidency was devoted to the **young generation** as the major victims of the Covid-19 epidemic and climate crisis. The 6th EUSAIR Forum at the same time recognised youth as the biggest hope of new thinking and an innovative approach in solving contemporary challenges, so Slovenia took it as a real compliment when Albanian Foreign Minister **Olta Xhaka** emphasized that they will continue the good practice of the Slovene Presidency – focusing specifically on young people!

Andreja Jerina,

National Coordinator of EU Macro-regional Strategies
Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Republic of Slovenia

VI ADRIATIC AND IONIAN COUNCIL / EUSAIR MINISTERIAL MEETING IZOLA DECLARATION

“ALONG THE SHORES OF THE SHARED SEA”

11 May 2021

We, the Representatives of the Governments of Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Greece, Italy, Montenegro, North Macedonia, Serbia and Slovenia, meeting in Izola (Slovenia), with the participation of a representative of the European Commission and in the presence of San Marino¹, in the framework of the Adriatic and Ionian Council/EUSAIR Ministerial Meeting and 6th Forum of the European Union Strategy for the Adriatic and Ionian Region:

1. GUIDED by the Ancona Declaration of 20 May 2000 and its basic principles, and 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 EUSAIR, on the basis of the Commission's Communication of 17 June 2014, and the Addendum to the EUSAIR Communication {COM(2020) 132 final} adopted by the Commission on 2 April 2020, including North Macedonia in EUSAIR;
2. ACKNOWLEDGE the reality of 2020 and 2021 marked by the COVID-19 pandemic and RECOGNISE that a common European response and cooperation between the participating countries in the Adriatic-Ionian Region is needed to tackle the ongoing pandemic and face the key challenge of socio-economic recovery;
3. RECOGNISE that Green Connectivity as the key objective of the Slovenian Presidency of EUSAIR/ AII² has contributed to improving the quality of life across the Adriatic and Ionian Region and should become a transversal component of all pillars in order to contribute to Europe's green recovery and green future. In that context, we RECOGNISE EUSAIR's contribution to the EU Sustainable Blue Economy through establishment of Blue Corridors³;
4. COMMIT to steer the post-crisis recovery towards green & digital transition in line with the European Green Deal and the Green Agenda for the Western Balkans together with the communications “Shaping Europe's Digital Future⁴” and the “Economic and Investment Plan for the Western Balkans⁵” with the support of the funds from the relevant 2021–2027 EU funding programmes;
5. COGNISANT of the EUSAIR's unique attractiveness to new members, following the accession of North Macedonia in 2020, RESPOND POSITIVELY to the request put forward by the Republic of San Marino and PROPOSE to the Council of the European Union to undertake all necessary steps to include the Republic of San Marino in the EU Strategy for the Adriatic and Ionian Region; also TAKE NOTE of the application of Cyprus to participate in EUSAIR;

¹ As the AII member.

² EU Strategy for the Adriatic and Ionian Region and Adriatic and Ionian Initiative.

³ As discussed on the 13th Governing Board meeting and based on “EUSAIR Synthesis Report: Multi-level Governance and Cross-Sector Practices Supporting the European Union Strategy for the Adriatic and Ionian Region”, OECD, 2019.

⁴ COM(2020)67 final

⁵ COM(2020) 641 final

6. REAFFIRM the support for the European perspective of the Western Balkans as well as the Western Balkans' continued commitment to the European perspective, building on the importance of good neighbourly relations and regional cooperation enhanced through the strengthened commitment of EUSAIR/AII to facilitate the EU enlargement process in the Western Balkans;

7. ENCOURAGE the implementation of the recommendations set in the Youth Manifesto⁶ in the EUSAIR region, WELCOME the AII Permanent Secretariat activities in this direction; and SUPPORT further active engagement of young people in EUSAIR/AII implementation. Hence, we INVITE each of the following presiding countries to further develop and promote the Young POPRI⁷ network, and benefit from the best entrepreneurial ideas challenging the smart, green and sustainable transition of Adriatic Ionian Region;

8. COMMIT to further promote the inclusion of civil society, COMMEND the idea of the Slovenian EUSAIR/AII Presidency awarding the Windmill of Excellence⁸ and conferring the honorary title of Ambassador of the EU Macro-regional Strategy and AGREE that the conferment of the title could become a tradition at EUSAIR fora.

9. EMPHASISING the role of National Parliaments as direct representatives of the people, RECOGNISE the importance of the 17th Conference of the Presidents/Speakers of Parliaments organised by the Slovenian AII Presidency in April that focused on the evolving digital society with a special emphasis on the opportunities and pitfalls for the younger generation;

10. REAFFIRM our clear commitment to provide meaningful governance, underlining the importance of capacity building, to ensure effective implementation of EUSAIR and REITERATE the need for adequate governance support to be available in all EUSAIR participating countries through the next ADRION Transnational Cooperation Programme 2021–2027;

11. CONSIDER the necessity of the revision of the EUSAIR Action Plan to adapt the Strategy to the changes in its membership and respond better to current challenges including those generated by the COVID-19 pandemic;

12. CALL upon the EUSAIR Facility Point to further support the smooth implementation of EUSAIR, capacity-building activities, engagement of the stakeholders, with a special emphasis on young people, communication and dialogues to enable further steps towards the establishment of networks of Managing Authorities;

13. WELCOME the timely adoption of flagship projects at an extraordinary Governing Board on 10 June 2020. CALL on all EUSAIR participating countries, with the support of the European Commission, to embed them, in the best possible way, in their programming documents for the 2021–2027 period, making full use of the relevant networks of Managing and Planning Authorities to be set

up for this purpose. We furthermore CALL on the EUSAIR Governing Board to closely monitor and, together with the European Commission, jointly assess the outcomes of the embedding process, and reflect the results of this assessment at the next EUSAIR Annual Forum;

14. REAFFIRM the traditional AII connecting role between Governments, regional actors and civil society FORA and their networks as an essential factor in the implementation phase of the macro-regional mechanism CONVINCED that subsidiarity is the key principle for success;

15. ACKNOWLEDGE the importance of contacts among secretariats of regional organisations in order to further develop synergies, exchange experience, best practices and know-how and WELCOME the results of the implementation of the Memorandum of Understanding between the CEI Executive Secretariat and the Adriatic and Ionian Initiative (AII) Permanent Secretariat signed in 2019, which resulted in a joint programme supporting “Active Young Citizens for Sustainable Development in Central European Initiative and Adriatic and Ionian Initiative Areas”;

16. CONFIRM the role of the AII as the “political anchorage” to EUSAIR and CONSIDER that efforts to fine-tune its activities and structures in order to contribute to the goals of the Strategy have achieved remarkable results mainly in the field of AII Round Tables, which now systematically cooperate with Thematic Steering Groups, providing them with the proposals and recommendations originating from civil society;

17. CONGRATULATE Slovenia for conducting a successful chairmanship over the EUSAIR and AII and, despite challenging times, successfully delivering numerous achievements as outlined in the Annex I and II to this declaration. In view of its forthcoming Presidency of Council of European Union, we ENCOURAGE Slovenia to further promote the contribution of Macro-regional Strategies to the EU enlargement process, the European Green Deal, Europe's Digital Transformation by 2030 and the Economic and Investment Plan for the Western Balkans;

18. ENTRUST the incoming AII/EUSAIR Chairmanship from 1 June 2021 to 31 May 2022 to Albania, inviting it to use all instruments at its disposal with the aim of leading all participating countries to sustainable social, environmental and economic prosperity in the Region.

⁶ Manifesto for Young People by Young People to shape the European Cooperation Policy, European Commission, October 2020.

⁷ POPRI international is a competition for the best entrepreneurial idea among young people from 9 countries of the Adriatic-Ionian macro region.

⁸ as specified in the “Proposal for a winner selection procedure and the awarding process for Ambassador of Macro-regional Strategies 2021”, presented at the 14th Governing Board meeting on 2 March 2021

EUSAIR FLAGSHIPS 2021-2027 adopted on 12th Extraordinary EUSAIR Governing Board meeting on 10 June 2020



PILLAR I: BLUE GROWTH

- Fostering quadruple helix ties in the fields of marine technologies and blue bio-technologies for advancing innovation, business development and business adaptation in blue bio-economy.
- Promoting Sustainability, Diversification and Competitiveness in the fisheries and aquaculture sectors through education, research & development, administrative, technological and marketing actions, including the promotion of initiatives on marketing standards and healthy nutritional habits.
- Bolstering capacity building and efficient coordination of planning and local development activities for improving marine and maritime governance and Blue Growth services.

PILLAR II: CONNECTING THE REGION – SUBGROUP TRANSPORT

- The Adriatic-Ionian multi-modal corridors.

PILLAR II: CONNECTING THE REGION – SUBGROUP ENERGY NETWORKS

- Power networks and market for a green Adriatic-Ionian region.
- Integrated natural gas corridors and market for a green Adriatic-Ionian region.
- Development and operation of logistics for direct LNG use as a clean fuel for the Adriatic-Ionian region.

PILLAR III: ENVIRONMENTAL QUALITY

- Development and implementation of Adriatic-Ionian Sub/regional Oil spill contingency plan (ASOSCOPI).
- Protection and enhancement of natural terrestrial habitats and ecosystems (PET HAB ECO).
- Promotion of sustainable growth of the Adriatic-Ionian region by implementing ICZM and MSP as well as to contribute CRF on ICZM of Barcelona convention and the appropriate monitoring and management of marine protected area (ICZM & MSP).

PILLAR IV: SUSTAINABLE TOURISM

- Development of the network of sustainable tourism business and clusters: Green Mapping for the Adriatic-Ionian Region – Supporting Development and Market Access for Responsible and Sustainable Tourism Destinations and Micro/SME Operations in the EUSAIR Region.
- Research and development for improvement of SME'S performance and growth diversification (CULTOURAIR).
- Training and skills in the field of tourism businesses (vocational and entrepreneurial skills) (DES_AIR).
- Expanding the tourist season to all-year round (CRUISAIR).
- Development of sustainable and thematic cultural routes/connecting cultural routes in EUSAIR (AIR CULTURAL ROUTES).

The additional information about listed flagships are available on the EUSAIR website (https://www.adriatic-ionian.eu/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/EUSAIR-flagships-GB_F.pdf), EUSAIR National Coordinators (<https://www.adriatic-ionian.eu/contacts/national-coordinators/>) and/or EUSAIR Pillar Coordinators (<https://www.adriatic-ionian.eu/contacts/pillar-coordinators/>) can provide further details.

Slovene Presidency of EUSAIR 20-21

The EU Strategy for the Adriatic-Ionian Region (EUSAIR), launched in 2014 to become the third Macro-regional Strategy in the European Union, covers an area of 70 million people from nine different countries. Of these, four countries (Croatia, Greece, Italy and Slovenia) are members of the European Union, and the other five are candidate countries or potential candidates (Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, North Macedonia and Serbia).

The Adriatic-Ionian Region is one of the most interesting tourist destinations on our continent. As many as seven of the 30 most visited regions in Europe are located in this area. At the same time, it is rich in terms of cultural heritage, since it contains a good 15% of all European attractions, the extraordinary universal value of which UNESCO recognizes.

Its advantage is also in its strategic position, since through the Suez Canal it enables an up to 3000 km shorter connection on the Central European markets – Far East route. This ensures improved land-sea connectivity and inter-modal transport and increases the competitiveness of inland economies.

The EU Strategy for the Adriatic-Ionian Region addresses the region's concrete challenges with an action plan based on four interdependent programme pillars: Blue Growth, Connecting the Region, Environmental Quality and Sustainable Tourism. The joint efforts of all four include disaster risk management, climate change mitigation and adaptation. In addition to the maritime dimension, the plan also includes the hinterland.

EUSAIR Facility Point

The EUSAIR Facility Point, created under the auspices of the INTEREG ADRION 2014-2020 programme, is a strategic project to facilitate harmonisation and coordination of the EU Strategy for the Adriatic-Ionian Region. It addresses the common challenges of the region and strengthens stakeholder cooperation for economic, social and territorial cohesion.

It assists the EUSAIR Governing Board, the Thematic Steering Groups and all stakeholders in simplifying public administration, addressing common priorities and implementing the action plan. At the same time, it ensures the greatest possible involvement of all those responsible for the implementation processes.

The EUSAIR Facility Point is an interweave of three aspects:

- **Place of collaboration:** a platform for all stakeholders and the EUSAIR management jointly to address all the challenges of the Macro-region.
- **Access to knowledge:** knowledge of the Macro-regional area, all about good practices, dissemination of own experience.
- **Access to information:** funding opportunities for relevant projects, participation in EUSAIR events and other information relating to EUSAIR.

Priorities of the Slovene Presidency of EUSAIR 20-21

Slovenia took over the Presidency of the EU Strategy for the Adriatic-Ionian Region from the Republic of Serbia on 1 June 2020 and held the Presidency until 31 May 2021 inclusive.

In order to improve the quality of life in coastal areas and in the hinterland, Slovenia set itself the key task of **Green Connectivity** during its Presidency of EUSAIR.

During this period, EUSAIR institutions developed a number of concrete arrangements and enforcement regimes, taking into account coastal and marine ecosystem services throughout the EUSAIR area, with a focus on the Adriatic eco-region. *"Recovery after the Covid-19 crisis must also be green,"* they wrote in their commitments at the beginning of the Presidency.

The second priority of the EUSAIR 20-21 Presidency was to **continue the EU enlargement process to the Western Balkans** and to start accession negotiations with Albania and North Macedonia, which, through their geographical location, strengthen internal cohesion in the region.

Special attention was also paid to the area of **competence building and communication** with key EUSAIR stakeholders and young people. Slovenia has to date devoted a large part of its activities to these contents, and this time it also took advantage of the opportunity offered by the management of the EUSAIR Facility Point.

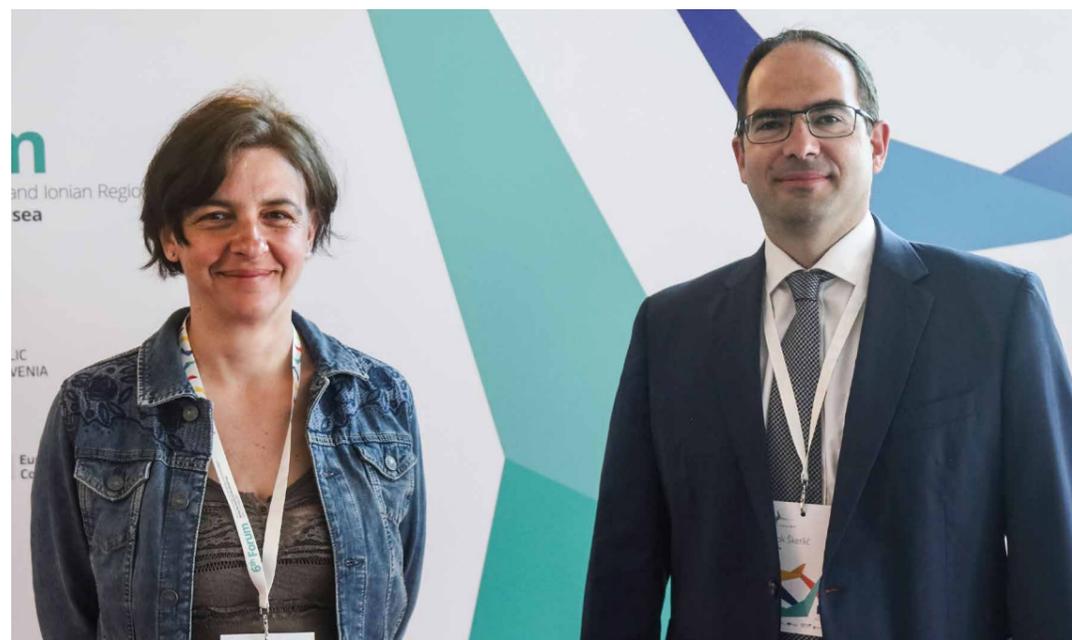
EUSAIR Facility Point strategic project is lead by **Government Office for Development and European Cohesion Policy of the Republic of Slovenia**. The **Municipality of Izola** acts as Slovene Project Partner and offered support to national members of Thematic Steering Groups with special emphasis on the Environmental Quality pillar. Through the **Public Institute for the Promotion of Entrepreneurship and Development Projects of the Municipality of Izola**, they were involved in the preparation of concepts for strategic (Macro-regional) projects, monitoring, reporting and evaluation for the environmental pillar, as well as support to stakeholders in the other three EUSAIR pillars.

Cooperation with the European Commission to ensure adequate financial resources and the insertion of agreed strategic Macro-regional activities in the EU cohesion and pre-accession programmes for the period 2021-2027 played a key role in fulfilling the set goals of the Slovene Presidency of EUSAIR 20-21.

Who was who during the Slovene Presidency of EUSAIR 20-21



Andreja Jerina, Mitja Bricelj



Staša Mesec, Iztok Škerlič

ANDREJA JERINA

National Coordinator of EU Macro-regional Strategies, Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Slovenia

Throughout the pre-accession period of Slovenia, Andreja acted as National Aid Coordinator. She was responsible for setting up the national system for external assistance management and negotiating financial arrangements with the European Commission. After the accession to the EU, in her capacity as Head of the Managing Authority for Structural and Cohesion Funds, she was responsible for the overall national coordination and financial management of EU funds. As Supreme State Auditor at the Court of Audit of Slovenia, she introduced the first audits of expenditures from the EU budget in Slovenia. During the economic and financial crisis, Andreja acted as State Secretary responsible for Development and EU Affairs, coordinating national anti-crisis measures, including the transition to results-based budgeting. She was actively involved in the EU enlargement process and membership negotiations with EU candidate countries. In 2018, she acted as EU High Level Advisor on Aid Coordination in Moldova. She currently works at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Slovenia as National Coordinator of EU Macro-regional Strategies.

MITJA BRICELJ

Coordinator of the EUSAIR Pillar III Environmental Quality, Ministry of the Environment and Spatial Planning of the Republic of Slovenia

Mitja Bricelj is a geographer who first tried journalistic waters. Due to his love of geography, he continued his career as a researcher at the Institute of Geography of the University of Ljubljana. He has been employed at the Ministry of the Environment and Spatial Planning since 1990. From 1993 to 1997 he was Director of the Administration of the Republic of Slovenia for Nature Protection, a body within the Ministry of the Environment and Spatial Planning, and since 1993 he has been the national coordinator of the Convention for the Protection of the Mediterranean Sea from Pollution with Protocol (Barcelona Convention), which is the legal basis for implementing the Mediterranean Action Plan (MAP/UNEP). He was also a member of its bureau in the period 2001-2003. Among other things, he also performs the function of president of the Association of Geographical Societies of Slovenia and is the author and leader of the project *Slovenia – Water Learning Path of Europe*.

IZTOK ŠKERLIČ

Public Institute for the Promotion of Entrepreneurship and Development Projects of the Municipality of Izola, EUSAIR Facility Point Slovene Project Partner

Iztok Škerlič has a master's degree in entrepreneurial sciences. He is directing all his energy through entrepreneurial projects into preserving both the cultural and natural heritage of the Slovene coast.

He honed his talents at the University Research Center of Primorska, ran the Primorska Incubator for four years, and then continued his career in the Government Office for Development and European Cohesion Policy of the Republic of Slovenia as head of the Joint Technical Secretariat for Cross-border Cooperation Programme between Slovenia and Italy. In 2016, he accepted the challenge of leading the Public Institute for the Promotion of Entrepreneurship and Development Projects of the Municipality of Izola, and today he is also acting as a Project Partner of the EUSAIR Facility Point.

STAŠA MESEC

EUSAIR Facility Point Project Manager, Government Office for Development and European Cohesion Policy, Republic of Slovenia

With the experience of living right next to the border and with her large family, Staša understands that the future is in our hands, depending on our ability to cooperate. In 2016 she accepted the challenge to lead the EUSAIR Facility Point project, which provides support to the operation of the strategy. Her vision is focused on activities that, with innovative, fresh ideas, contribute to trust both within the core team of the partnership and among all stakeholders in the region. By heart and profession, she is a geographer, a regional planner, and since 2002 she has been employed by the Government Office for Development and European Cohesion Policy in various areas of development policies.



Timeline 2020

May

26 May – 1 June
Presentations of the Flagship priorities by the Pillars to the EUSAIR governance structures and stakeholders

27 May
 Videoconference of EUSAIR ministers and meeting of the Adriatic-Ionian Council.
 Taking over the Presidency from the Republic of Serbia.

June

5 – 6 June
2nd International Conference of the Association of Geography Teachers of Slovenia “Climate Change”, Štanjel, Slovenia

10 June
Extraordinary 12th meeting of the EUSAIR Governing Board.
 Agreement on key priority projects (“flagships”) of EUSAIR for inclusion in European Structural and Investment Funds (ESIF) and strategic documents for pre-accession assistance (IPA) of the EU for the period 2021-2027. In accordance with the European Green Deal, environmental issues were chosen as the main topic of the Slovene Presidency. Special emphasis on young people.

August

31 August
Strategic Forum Bled

September

9 September
EuroScience Open Forum (ESOF)

14 – 25 September
Mediterranean Coast and Macro-regional Strategies Week. The traditional meeting in Izola became the first such regular annual event at the European level. See pages 24-30 for details.

16 September
 Within **Mediterranean Coast and EU Macro-regional Strategies Week, 3rd meeting of the TRIO presidencies of the four Macro-regional Strategies.**
 Discussion of the best solutions for monitoring and evaluating the process of *embedding and meaningful governance*.

17 September
13th meeting of the EUSAIR Governing Board

Explanation of abbreviations

AIC – Adriatic Ionian Council | **DG NEAR** – Directorate General for Neighbourhood and Enlargement Negotiations
DG REGIO – Directorate General for Regional and Urban Policy | **EC** – European Commission | **ESIF** – European Structural and Investment Funds
EMMF – European Maritime and Fisheries Fund | **EIP** – Economic and Investment Plan | **EPPA** – EU Environment Partnership Programme for Accession | **ESI** – European Stability Initiative | **EUSALP** – EU Strategy for the Alpine Region | **EUSAIR** – EU Strategy for the Adriatic-Ionian Region | **EUSBSR** – EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region | **EUSDR** – EU Strategy for the Danube Region | **FP** – EUSAIR Facility Point | **GI** – Green Infrastructure | **GB** – EUSAIR Governing Board | **IPA** – Instrument for Pre-Accession Assistance | **MA** – Managing Authority | **MFA** – Ministry of Foreign Affairs | **MS** – Member State | **MRS** – Macro-regional Strategies | **MSP** – Maritime Spatial Plan | **NC** – National Coordinator
OP – Operational Programme | **PA** – Partnership Agreement | **S3** – Smart Specialisation Strategies | **TSG** – Thematic Steering Group
WB – Western Balkans

Timeline 2021

October

12 – 15 October

European Week of Regions and Cities

EUSAIR has presented itself as *"the only Macro-regional Strategy managed by all countries in the region, regardless of their political status, which is a unique European integration tool."* It also differs in the way the four thematic pillars are managed. Two coordinators are responsible for each pillar: a representative of an EU Member State and a representative of a non-Member State. They also boast a growing membership, unique management support and a strong political will to make joint commitments. All EUSAIR participating countries have national Project Partners in EUSAIR Facility Point strategic project. Non-EU countries thus also have their own groups with developed institutional capacity to act in line with EU policies and to manage even the most demanding projects, such as the EUSAIR Presidency.

Monitoring inclusion of macro-regional projects. *»Agreement on priority projects is an important step, but only the first. This time, we are timely in providing appropriate guidance for the integration process of Macro-regional Strategies. It is now of key importance to monitor the inclusion process,"* said **Andreja Jerina**.

November

6 November

Virtual conference »Past, Present, Future of Interreg MED programme and governance in the Mediterranean«. Exploring contributions of the Interreg MED Programme 2021-2027 to different EUSAIR pillars and exploring concrete ways of mainstreaming transnational (at MED level) results towards EUSAIR priorities.

EUSAIR as a laboratory for a New Europe: Macro-regional Strategies pushing European Integration. The MRS governance structure is generic; contexts are specific. We therefore have within the 4 MRS a large portion of common core, and mainly the same specificities due to the territories we cover. The four MRS provide us with functioning networks in the wider European (beyond EU) space, which, based on mutual trust and mutual understanding, are able to agree on common actions.

15 and 16 October Interreg 30th anniversary annual meeting. Building on our complementarities, we need to open up silos between the programmes, we need regular cross programme exchange to find synergies and to act in a coordinated and harmonised manner. Since they are financing programmes, only then we will truly provide value for public money.

January

28 – 29 January

5th EUSAIR Forum, Belgrade, Serbia. Flexibility among countries; due to the pandemic, the 5th forum under the Serbian Presidency was only organised in January 2021, during the Slovene Presidency. The virtual event was attended by over 800 participants who listened the content on green transformation, digitization of the region and how jointly address the Covid-19 pandemic crisis, focusing on the recovery of cultural and creative industries in the region. At the heart of the two-day programme was the issue of EU enlargement to the Western Balkans and the contribution of EUSAIR participating countries to a greener future for the region.

February

14 February

First part of the **14th meeting of the EUSAIR Governing Board.**

March

5 March

Week of EU Macro-regional Strategies. The European Commission, together with the implementers of Macro-regional Strategies, organized it in virtual form. In its chairmanship role, Slovenia organized a discussion on the contribution of the Adriatic-Ionian (EUSAIR) and Danube (EUSDR) Macro-regional Strategies to the implementation of the Economic and Investment Plan (EIP) for the Western Balkans (WB).

Representatives of EUSAIR, EUSDR, the European Commission and the national IPA coordinators wondered whether the strategic priorities of the two Macro-regional Strategies, driven by IPA funds, could lead us to **faster implementation of the Economic and Investment Plan for the WB.** The territory is the same, the goal is clear, and Macro-regional Strategies, with their strategic priorities and well-established cooperation networks, may be the best tool to lead us towards achieving this goal.

Youth Dialogue. The event, open to the public, was intended to review the activities performed by Macro-regional Strategies to activate young people. Slovenia, together with the Primorska Technology Park and EUSAIR Facility Point, presented plans for cooperation with young people, including the newly established network of technology parks in all countries of the Adriatic-Ionian Region, whose members are trained by Primorska Technology Park to work with young people (14-29 years) to develop entrepreneurial thinking.

April

With the POPRI project, over a thousand educational institutions, with more than a thousand mentors, worked with few thousands of young people across the macro-region in the development of entrepreneurial ideas; the best of them will be presented at the 6th EUSAIR Forum. Slovenia presented an initiative to make this a regular feature of the future presidencies and annual EUSAIR Forums, including financial support – POPRI powered by EUSAIR. It was also agreed to try to ensure in-depth and coordinated activation of young people within all 4 Macro-regional Strategies. Cooperation with young people will also occur as regular dialogue on current topics in the region.

The meeting of the Trio presidencies of all four MRSs was hosted by the French Presidency of EUSALP. In the focus was an assessment of progress in embedding of MRS priorities in the 2021-2027 programming period and a pilot project to train Macro-regional "trainers".

The **second part of the 14th meeting of the EUSAIR Governing Board** also took place as part of EU MRS Week.

15 April **Mainstream, cross-border and transnational programmes meet EUSAIR**

Various programmes operating within the same territory were invited to present their possible contribution towards EUSAIR Flagship priorities from the national, cross-border and trans-national perspective. The event was only a beginning and introduction; there is a strong intention to organise a long-term cooperation. Exchange and cooperation among Managing Authorities through, for example, managing authorities' networks, is a way to learn from each other!

May

10 – 12 May **6th EUSAIR Forum Izola and 6th Adriatic and Ionian Council / EUSAIR ministerial meeting.**

The substantive conclusion of the Slovene Presidency and the opportunity to present all the activities carried out in the past year. See pages 44-77 for details.

25 May **15th meeting of the EUSAIR Governing Board.** Future EUSAIR Facility Point functions agreed as an input for ADRION Task Force.



Introduction to the Manual for recognising and planning green infrastructure

Now, more than ever, citizens feel the need for a healthy environment. The Covid-19 pandemic has brought people closer to nature, closer to profiting more from the green spaces around them, whether they are in natural areas, in the countryside or in urban spaces. This made clearer how fragile is nature and how important it is to make every possible effort to protect it.

Green infrastructures are a key element for doing it and stopping the loss of biodiversity. They provide huge benefits and vital services to people, society and nature.

In regions in which many political borders create both administrative and physical obstacles to the protection of nature and biodiversity, joint planning and implementation of green infrastructures is key to reversing the loss of biodiversity.

Macro-regional Strategies offer an ideal framework for policy coordination in certain European regions. They allow harmonized implementation of the relevant EU legislation and policy in both the participating Member States and in candidate and potential candidate countries, thus facilitating alignment with the EU acquis and practices in this sector. In particular, they contribute to tailoring the implementation of the European Green Deal, including the *EU Biodiversity Strategy for 2030*, to the needs of a specific territory crossing several borders.

In order to support the efforts of the EU Strategy for the Adriatic and Ionian Region and EU Strategy for the Danube Region for the deployment of Green Infrastructures, the European Commission financed a study under the EU Environment Partnership Programme for Accession (EPPA) in the Western Balkans that identified conservation areas of high transboundary importance and explored the level of existing landscape connections between them. The study, finalized at the end of 2020, contributes to the *EU Biodiversity Strategy for 2030*, as well as to establishing a coherent Trans-European Nature Network and to the implementation of the EU Nature Restoration Plan in the Region.

The *Manual for Recognising and Planning Green Infrastructure* is a positive initiative that goes in exactly the same direction and we are confident that can be a sound basis for planning an efficient network of green infrastructures in the framework of EU Macro-regional Strategies.

Jean-Pierre Halkin

Head of Unit Macro-regions, Transnational/Interregional/ External Co-operation, Enlargement, Directorate General for Regional and Urban Policy, European Commission



»When I arrive at work in the morning, I'm thrilled by a kingfisher«

Interview with **Klavdij Godnič**,
director of SOLINE Pridelava soli d. o. o.



Active salt pans are an example of coexistence between economic activity, tourism and the needs of nature conservation. What risk does intense climate change pose for this coexistence?

Climate change poses an increasing risk both to salt production and to the landscape park itself: if we can no longer produce salt, we will also endanger all plants and animals that live here.

The first challenge is the rise in the sea level. High and low tides are higher, and the entire system of the Sečovlje salt pans is a closed system. In the event of rain, all rainwater retained in the landscape park is released on a free-fall basis. However, because the tides are getting higher, the water drop is smaller or, put another way, less water flows out of the closed system in the same period of time. The quantities of fresh water are not changing during the year compared to the past; what we observe is that it is raining more intensely. This extends the number of days it takes to drain all the water from the system.

The salt pans are dry for up to five days longer. During this time, damage to salt fields and freshwater plants can occur. As a result, salt extraction is more difficult, and the picture of the entire landscape park is also changing.

Did climate changes play a key role in the last few poor salt harvests? Can you even combat them at the micro-local level? What does sea level rise mean for salt pans?

Salt production periods are shorter. In the last ten years, we have produced an average of 2,000 tons of salt per year, in 2013, when the harvest was exceptional, even 5,000 tons of salt. The year before last we had already dropped to 1,200 tons, and last year we produced only 800 tons of salt.

We are not accepting new customers this year. If we record two or three more bad harvests, it will be difficult to offer it to the market. Some brands are very dependent on us, since they use our logo on their products. In the event that we are unable to supply them with salt, they will be forced to change the entire production process. Such as Lokev prosciutto factory, Kodila, Ljubljanske mlekarne ... We are already supplying limited quantities of salt to larger retail chains.

The state, which last year adopted an ambitious plan to protect the landscape park with its hinterland, is of great help to us. The frontal embankments, both banks

of the Drnica River and the left bank of the Jernej Channel will be restored and raised, and in 2024 the right bank of the Dragonja River will be raised. With these interventions, the landscape park will be protected from sea level rise for a further 50 years.

At the same time, we have begun to adjust the internal structure of the park by deepening the ditches to increase the flow and raising the edge ditches to reduce the possibility of flooding. In the next three years, we also plan to build an electric pumping station, including renovation of the existing one, which will allow us shorter periods of emptying the salt pans and extending the salt production season. This will also improve the living conditions for our birds and plants.

We are also active in the Slovene PDO consortium (protected designation of origin) as well as in the European Association of Unrefined Salt Producers, through which we try to protect our local interests in a very global business world.

How do you preserve the biodiversity of a typical saltwater ecosystem? Which of the activities that you carry out in the field of sustainable development do you consider to be the most important in the long run?

Two projects are underway to preserve biodiversity in our landscape park. The first takes place under the auspices of the Ministry of the Environment and Spatial Planning within the climate programme and is intended to reduce the carbon footprint and adjust the internal structure of the park. In parallel, activities are being carried out according to the national spatial plan for raising the main embankments and key watercourses.

It is crucial to protect our wetlands and the entire coastal area in order to stop the rising sea in the long run as a result of the increasingly warmer climate. This is a global challenge.

Sečovelje Saltpans Landscape Park is home to many birds. Birds on account of which the special protection area/Natura 2000 was determined, are the subject of detailed inventory and evaluation. Which one are you especially proud of, that it chose our Slovene salt pans as its home?

We are home to over 300 species of birds. We have been monitoring the conditions for their stay in the Sečovelje Saltpans Landscape Park since 2003, and the conditions for birds as well as other animals and plants are steadily improving.

In Fontaniči, a nature protection area where there is no more active salt production, through European projects we have built quite a few trenches and small raised islands where they can nest. We take care to create additional housing for them.

Since the management plan was adopted, the number of birds has increased. If winters are warmer, some don't even migrate. We sometimes also notice some new species. Otherwise, we have not observed that climate change affect the numbers or even the extinction of any of the species.

Personally, the most interesting bird to me is the plover. It is the bird with the longest legs relative to its body. In the morning, when I arrive at work, I am also thrilled by a kingfisher. It is a small bird with an unusual way of hunting. Then we have a whole bunch of herons and a European pond turtle, which has the largest habitat in the country here, of which we are very proud.

We carry out birdwatching at Fontaniči, and together with naturalists we also organize ringing. In short, we have quite a few activities for sharing the diversity of our ecosystem with visitors.

The basic orientation of Slovene tourism is sustainable development. How does your Thalasso Spa Lepa Vida fit into the national strategy? What do you think are the advantages of Sustainable Tourism products? How much does a Slovene consumer value Sustainable Tourism products?

Thalasso Spa is located in the landscape park. Due to Natura 2000, we were forced to accept a whole lot of restrictions on construction. Practically everything is made of wood and placed on piles. Both wastewater and all sewage are discharged from the park via pressure pumps, so that no sewage remains in the spa but goes into the sea. We do not use chlorine in the pools, the entire pool technology is controlled from Germany via the Internet. It is a technology that, on the level of ozone, is without chemicals.

In addition, we have many other limitations. The spa, which covers 4,000 m² in a very remote part of the salt pans, can only be accessed by electric car, which awaits you at reception. Another option is access along the River Drnica, which is even more beautiful, and then on foot along the sea path to the spa. In addition, the spa also has a limit on the number of guests. We only have 55 wardrobes.

Due to the pandemic, we were only allowed to open last June. We were sure it would be a disastrous season. So far, the spa had been visited mainly by foreign guests – as many as 85% compared to 15% domestic guests. We were pleasantly surprised when the structure of guests changed in an instant to 85% domestic and 15% foreign guests. Due to limitations, we were completely sold out. People have started to appreciate tourism that coexists with nature, they love being outside. I'm not afraid for the future, since we notice that people buy Gift Cards over the winter as well.

You manage a 700-year tradition and three brands, Piran Salt Pans, Sečovelje Saltpans Landscape Park and Lepa Vida. Which was most marked by the current Covid-19 pandemic and why?

The Covid-19 pandemic affected all points of our business except the spa. Visits to the park practically stopped. Salt consumption has also decreased, only spas as a tourist attraction have remained immune to the pandemic.

The biggest shock was our shops in the old town, which are very popular among tourists. We were able to sell cosmetics and salt but, due to the smaller number of tourists, our sales dropped by as much as 60%.

Our flagship, salt production and sales, had a minus during the pandemic. The second blow was the decline in park attendance. Most tourists who visit the Slovene coast, as well as visitors to Postojna Cave, come to us. We are recognized in the world as one of the most protected wetlands. Schools were also closed. Kindergartens, hotels, which are one of our biggest consumers of salt, were closed.

You have experience with many European-funded projects (Climaparks, Habit-Change, Saltpark etc.) Which of them is the best example of good practice that could be of interest to partners from other countries of the Adriatic-Ionian region?

I would like to highlight three European projects of which we are especially proud. The largest project was the multi-year European LIFE project, which aimed to protect wetland habitats. When I joined the company in 2012, it was not possible to access the administrative building, located in the very centre of the salt pans, by road. The road was practically flooded and we could not take away the salt. Through activities within the

LIFE project, we have protected the salt pans from further collapse. We have built quite a few front embankments and locks to regulate the water.

Three years ago, with the Norwegian *Cars Out* project, we closed the entire park to traffic, thus contributing to a lower carbon footprint and introducing electrification. Before that, all employees and tenants of the salt fields came to the salt pans by car. Today, everyone, including tourists, leave their cars in front of the park. This project also changed the mindset of the people. Within the Saltworks projects, we arranged bird habitats.

We all have the same climate challenges in the Adriatic-Ionian Region, such as preservation of wetlands or areas connected to the sea, since the sea rises equally everywhere. Some salt pans in the Adriatic, in Italy too, which produce salt by hand, are deteriorating. Revitalization of the production of unrefined salt that does not go through an industrial process would be welcome. It is of much higher quality. It is less salty and contains more calcium.

Mediterranean Coast and EU Macro-regional Strategies Week

Izola 2020

The story of Mediterranean Coast and Macro-regional Strategies Week has grown from a local initiative into a high-profile international event, annually attracting the interest of members and non-members of the European Union, from the Baltic through the Alps and the Danube to the Adriatic and Ionian Seas. The fifth MCW opened its doors on 15 September 2020 in Izola. Despite the complex epidemiological situation, the organizers selected four current challenges of the European space and carried out most of the events virtually. The comprehensive MCW 2020 programme was based on EUSAIR priority projects for the period 2021-2027, which were approved only a few days after Slovenia took over the EUSAIR Presidency.

At the opening ceremony, which took place in Manzioli Palace, the Mayor of Izola **Danilo Markočič** greeted all friends and creators of Mediterranean Coast and Macro-regional Strategies Week 2020. He emphasized that the Week is the first major event during the Slovene Presidency and is devoted to related content that will shape the future of the region's more than 70 million people.

"The European Commission recognized the well-done work of Izola in the preparation of environmental projects and entrusted the municipality with the preparation of a workshop on the Green Agreement within MCW 2020," said **Iztok Škerlič**, director of Public Institute for the Promotion of Entrepreneurship and Development Projects of the Municipality of Izola, EUSAIR Facility Point Slovene Project Partner.

The representative of the European Commission in Slovenia, **Zoran Stančič**, emphasized the importance of the achievements of Macro-regional Strategies so far. *"It is these resounding achievements that have decisively contributed to the fact that last February, the European Commission hosted for the first time in Brussels a meeting of all four EU Macro-regional Strategies,"* he added.

Andreja Jerina, National Coordinator of EU Macro-regional Strategies, highlighted Europe's comprehensive recovery from the Covid-19 epidemic by jointly revitalizing tourism and creating green infrastructure: *"It is not possible to think otherwise than strengthening the resistance of the EU, for example in relation to food production. In this context, EUSAIR participating countries could also contribute to Smart Europe and the implementation of the smart specialization strategy. It is a simultaneous implementation of the European Green Deal."*

Nina Seljak, Director of the Department for European Territorial Cooperation and Financial Mechanisms at Government Office for Development and European Cohesion Policy, described the management within the EUSAIR Facility Point as an important foundation on which Slovenia builds friendships, relations and trust between countries in the region.

Member of the European Parliament **Franc Bogovič** also wished the creators of MCW 2020 successful work by video message.

WORKSHOP ON TOURISM RECOVERY

The starting point of Mediterranean Coast and Macro-regional Strategies Week 2020 was a workshop on the recovery of tourism after the pandemic. The workshop, which took place both virtually and in the Slovene coastal town of Izola, with a strong fishing tradition, brought together 50 participants from all four macro-regions, the Adriatic-Ionian, Danube, Alpine and Baltic, on 14 September. The chosen topic was not accidental, since tourism as an industry has suffered the most damage during the pandemic.

The challenge of the first workshop was how to connect all members of the four macro-regions and adequately address the problems faced by tourism employees in the field. All these regions offer many opportunities for the exchange of good practice and experience. The EU has therefore recently proposed that an evaluation of the cooperation efforts to revitalize tourism be carried out by key tourism players in all four macro-regions.

The workshop was opened by the national coordinator, **Andreja Jerina**, and was compered by **Johan Magnusson**, Representative of the European Commission's Directorate General for Regional and Urban Policy.

Ramune Genzbigelyte, with a lecture entitled Tourism in the EU on the road to a sustainable recovery, **Joanna Mouliou**, who presented Interreg's investments in tourism for the period 2021-2027, and **Georgis Drakopoulos**, who provided an assessment of the impact of Covid-19 on tourism in the four Macro-regions and how to recover with cooperation, shared their views on the current situation in tourism and the possibilities for cooperation among the regions.

Representatives of the regions presented the situation in tourism together with the opportunities and needs for this sector after the pandemic: **Andrea Krabbe** from the Baltic and **Irina Cozme** from the Danube, while **Francois Boissac** reported on the situation in the Alpine region, the Adriatic-Ionian region was represented by **Blanka Beloševič**. The highlight of the workshop was provided by **Jean-Pierre Halkin** (Directorate General for Regional and Urban Policy, EC) who announced the creation of a special declaration on cooperation in tourism, with guidelines for programming priorities for the development of sustainable tourism.

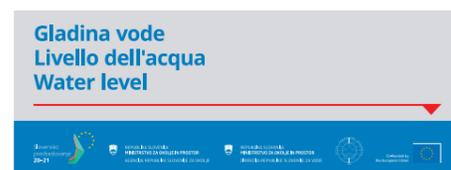
YOUTH, WATER AND EUSAIR

On 18 September, Piran and Koper also hosted one of the most interesting accompanying events of Mediterranean Coast and Macro-regional Strategies Week, entitled "Youth, Water and EUSAIR", which presented the action of the sea and flood waters. The inhabitants of Slovene coastal towns are increasingly experiencing the action of the sea and water as crisis flooding of the urban coastal zone.

Under the mentorship of geography teachers, primary school students from two Slovene coastal towns, in cooperation with the Environmental Agency of the Republic of Slovenia (ARSO), prepared a campaign to put up signs at

the highest measured values so far during sea flooding. This initiative was created within the framework of the *Public Education Programme for Adaptation to Climate Change*, in the name of which, at the end of spring 2020, the Association of Geography Teachers of Slovenia, in cooperation with the Ministry of the Environment and Spatial Planning, organized a very well received international conference *Štanjel 2020*.

At the end of September, young people at the Aquarium in Piran and at the building of the Maritime Administration in Koper drew attention to the probable future catastrophic consequences of the action of the sea and water if we are unable to respond actively to this burning challenge. In Izola, such a sign was placed in the courtyard of Rex Gallery in 2019.



EU green infrastructure is synonymous for a better life, with natural solutions, and as such contributes to healthy marine ecosystems and other real benefits, such as food production, recreation and tourism, climate change mitigation, coastal risk reduction and disaster prevention. European policy is continuing to implement ambitious investments in European natural capital in the future.

All four European Macro-regions face environmental challenges. They are aware that they cannot be successfully addressed without mutual cooperation, so they devoted the workshop to a more efficient use of the structures offered by Macro-regional Strategies to achieve the set goals of the European Green Deal. The discussion focused on the conservation and restoration of ecosystems, biodiversity and the transition to a circular economy.

The third EUSAIR thematic pillar, which addresses the Environmental Quality, is coordinated by Slovenia and Bosnia and Herzegovina, who prepared an introductory contribution to the discussion. **Mitja Bricelj** from Ministry of the Environment and Spatial Planning of the Republic of Slovenia and **Senad Oprašić**, Head of Environmental Protection Department, Ministry of Foreign Trade and Economic Relations of Bosnia and Herzegovina showed how Macro-regional activities contribute to the EU's Green Deal and presented land (green) and sea (blue) corridors in the Adriatic-Ionian Region as environmental components of green infrastructure areas that maintain and improve biodiversity.

Among the proposed measures to improve biodiversity and ecosystem services in the EUSAIR region, they highlighted the importance to extend the network of marine protected areas (MPAs) in Adriatic-Ionian Region, sustainable green fisheries, the development of green ports, the connection of the Blue and Green Corridors with new infrastructure for green and healthy tourist destinations in the region, with particular emphasis on the challenges of the Gulf of Trieste.

In conclusion, the discussants agreed that the exchange of experiences, good practices and information with the other three macro-regions is also crucial.

Together with the topic of the European Green Deal, it is also worth mentioning an accompanying event, the conference "Forest Science for Forests of the Future", which took place in parallel with the MCW at the Biotechnical Faculty in Ljubljana. It was devoted to the systematic presentation of genetic monitoring of forests and biodiversity in changing environments. The programme also included a visit to the primeval forest in Rajhenavski Rog, Kraków Forest and the genetic monitoring area Pri Studencu.

OPPORTUNITIES OF THE EUROPEAN GREEN DEAL

The second half of Mediterranean Coast and Macro-regional Strategies Week kicked off with a two-day EUSAIR virtual workshop entitled "Opportunities of a Green Deal for Macro-Regions".

The central goal of the EU Green Deal is gradually to transform the European Union into an energy-balanced, economically efficient and competitive society. The European concept of green infrastructure, an international standard for modern spatial planning, has been used since 2013, but the European Commission agrees that the concept is not sufficiently used in the development of maritime spatial plans.

WITH SMART SPECIALISATION TO SUCCESSFUL BLUE GROWTH

September 23 and 24 were devoted to the Smart Specialization Strategy (S3). The virtual workshop devoted the first day to the exchange of information, experience and mutual transfer of knowledge within the EUSAIR thematic pillar for Blue Growth. Two topics were highlighted, the implementation of S3 in the programming period 2014-2020 and the creation of S3 in the next programming period.

In the introductory part, the participants were addressed by the representatives of the European Commission, **Jean-Pierre Halkin** from the Directorate General for Regional and Urban Policy and **Isabelle Viallon** from the Directorate General for Maritime Affairs and Fisheries. One of the goals of the meeting was to establish regular cooperation in the region in the field of S3.

The contents of the first of a series of planned events, entitled "Against the networking of smart strategies of the Adriatic-Ionian region – a step towards closer internationalization", were connected by **Simona Knežević**, who planned the event together with Government Office for Development and European Cohesion Policy of the Republic of Slovenia.

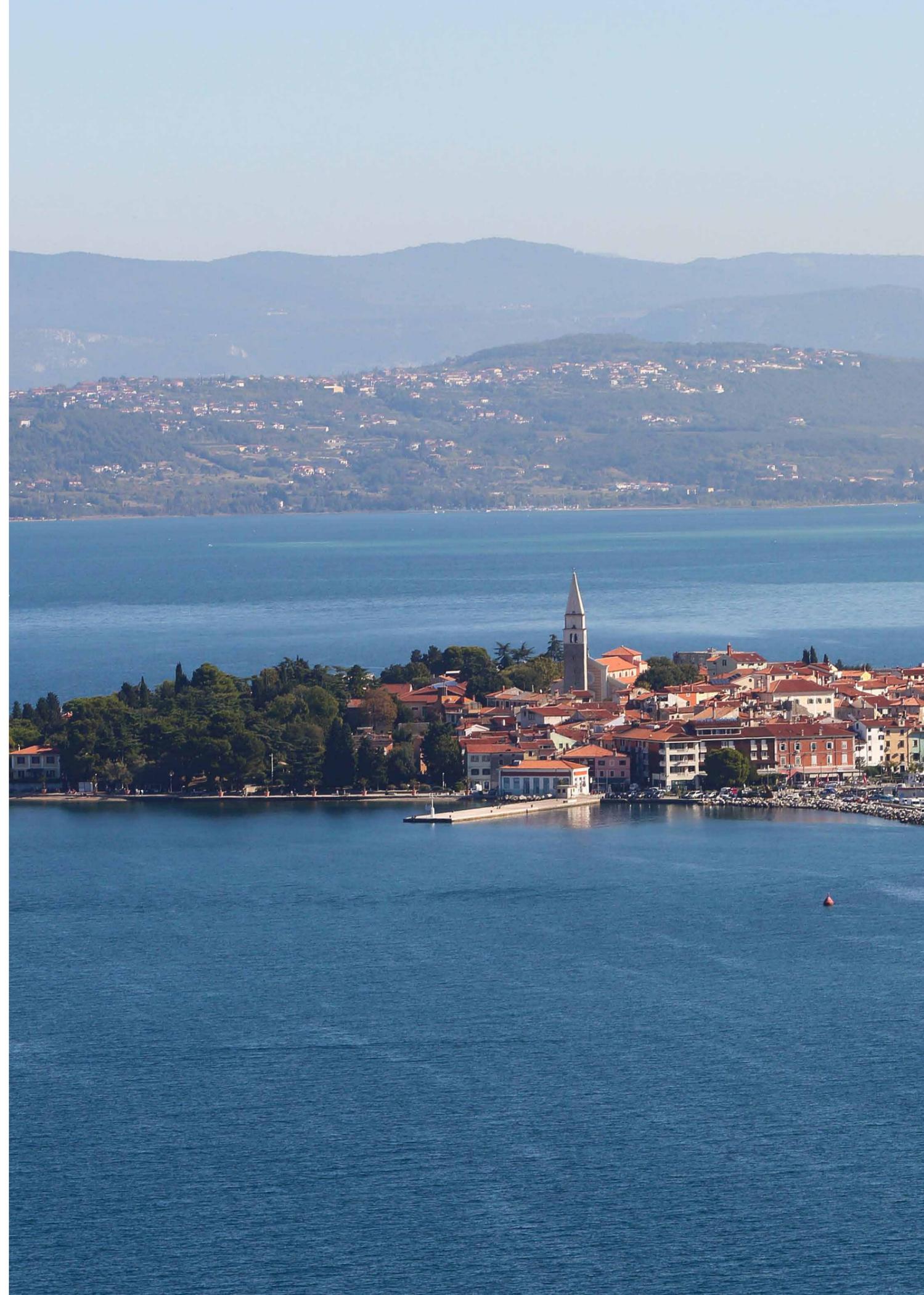
The participants were acquainted with the implementation of the priority tasks and goals of the programme for the period 2014-2020 and heard the planned activities for the period 2021-2027. **Aleš Gnamuš** presented an assessment of the situation in the region, with an emphasis on opportunities, on behalf of the European Institute for Technological Foresight, and the findings of the Adriatic-Ionian Network OIS-AIR in the field of innovation and Blue Growth were shared by Croatian colleague **Domagoj Šarić**.

Slovenia's smart specialization strategy was presented by **Gorazd Jenko** from the Government Office for Development and European Cohesion Policy, and **Gregor Čufer** from the European Commission's Directorate General for Regional and Urban Policy discussed the added value of regional cooperation and coordinated policy-making, with a focus on EU-supported Blue Growth.

The second day was devoted to a review of many good practices in the field of Blue Growth, with special emphasis on the blue bio-economy in the Adriatic-Ionian macro-region. These are projects that are already underway within various national or international incentives:

Staša Mesec, Project Manager of the EUSAIR Facility Point for the Adriatic-Ionian Region, presented the idea of closer cooperation among the sectors covering S3 in the region, which was warmly welcomed by the participants. Based on the evaluation, **Aleksandar Joksimović** of the Institute of Marine Biology in Kotor, informed participants about forecasts of Blue Growth, while **Elena Banci**, a leading associate of OIS-AIR from Area Science Park in Trieste, informed participants about the Blue AIR project. Examples of good practice were also contributed by Greek colleague **Stavros Kalognomos** with the topic "Cultural and creative regional ecosystems", **Vladimir Atanasovski** from North Macedonia, from the Centre for Technology Transfer and Innovation of the Faculty of Electrical Engineering and Information Technology in Skopje and SRIP Director for the Circular Economy from the Štajerska Chamber of Commerce **Dragica Marinič**. Strategic research and innovation partnership for sustainable food production was presented by **Tatjana Zagorc** from the Chamber of Commerce of Slovenia, and they also heard a presentation of the PanoramEd project of the Jožef Stefan Institute explained by **Živa Antauer** and the PlanetCare project by **Andrej Kržan**, from the Institute of Chemistry of Slovenia.

The two-day meeting concluded with the formation of conclusions on further steps of cooperation among EUSAIR members and agreed on the next meeting in September 2021.





»Spatial maritime plans are one of the foundations of the realization of the Green Plan«

Interview with **Danilo Markočič**,
Mayor of the Municipality of Izola



How do you look at the one-year Slovene Presidency now, after the end of the 6th EUSAIR Forum, which your colleagues from the Izola Municipality, especially the Public Institute for the Promotion of Entrepreneurship and Development Projects of the Municipality of Izola, successfully carried out in close partnership with the capital?

That's what it's all about, two-way traffic: that, on the one hand, international, cross-border, regional projects such as EUSAIR only really prove their worth when they are felt by citizens; on the other hand, without the active participation of "locals", no national, let alone international, initiative can succeed. The Mediterranean teaches us at every step and with every wave that there are no partial solutions: what the tide does here is experienced as the ebb there; if the fish stock pays the price of development on one coast, the other coast will experience it too. So all the right solutions are really holistic. That's also why our 6th Forum had the slogan *Along the Coasts of the Shared Sea*.

The Slovene Presidency focused on the Green Pillar, the quality of the environment and Green Connectivity. One could say that Izola and Istria are vitally interested in each of the four "sails", and especially in Blue Growth and sustainable tourism.

The Covid-19 epidemic has taught us how many things stop if tourism stops. Not only jobs and travel, but literally life: catering, culture, crafts – all this is closely linked with tourism in Slovene Istria, as well as on most of the Adriatic and Ionian coasts. This topic certainly marked the year of the Slovene Presidency. I must say, though, that we also monitored and actively participated in the Pillar of Blue Growth in great detail – long before the Presidency, which only intensified our activities.

Let me look back a little: in April 2019, experts gathered at the Piran Marine Biological Station of the National Institute of Biology to discuss the potentials for Blue Growth and define development priorities in Slovenia. Colleague Škerlič then presented the concept of Blue Growth, as written in the EUSAIR thematic section, and then through discussions on Mediterranean and Slovene needs, they came to five essential contents of Blue Development, to which were added two more that appeared most often in the discussion. Why is this important? Because it seems that our priorities are set in a global context, while carefully thought out locally.

And what are these priorities?

Let me list them as they were defined at the time, since they show very nicely from where the Slovene Presidency also drew emphasis and inspiration: greening of blue economic activities and mobility (including transport logistics), sustainable tourism, sustainable food production (including fishing), environmental protection (including the marine environment), capacity building, preparing for climate change and defining actions to adapt and mitigate the effects of climate change, governance of maritime space.

They thus came up with seven framework contents, which are now among the national priorities of blue development. It was also emphasized in the discussion that participants employed in government bodies and public institutions should pass on these findings to those responsible. The aim was to guide the various ministries and government departments to follow national blue development priorities in policy planning and day-to-day activities.

The list of “seven glorious” blue developments ends with the current topical theme of governance of maritime space ...

Here, the key “breakthrough” took place within the one-year Slovene Presidency, at **Mediterranean Coast Week** last September, in Izola. More precisely, on 18 September 2020, the spatial maritime plan of Slovenia was presented in the meeting room of the municipal building on Kristanov trg. Its key mission is to promote sustainable growth of the maritime economy and ensure sustainable use of marine resources. It is the largest intertwining of the development of activities, uses and regimes at sea and on the coast. The preparation of the first Maritime Spatial Plan is based on EU Directive 2014/89 and the Slovene Spatial Planning Act. In addition to maritime affairs and fisheries, it covers ten other activities related to the sea, from mariculture to nature protection and cultural heritage.

The presented working draft also included warnings about problematic interventions in space, such as the planned island in front of Izola, the relocation and disposal of sea sludge from the area of the Port of Koper and marinas, and expansion of the coast at Semedela and Žusterna. In a special chapter, they also focused on the prevention and management of possible accidents at sea and the disposal of contaminated material.

At the end of *Mediterranean Coast Week*, the coordinator of the EUSAIR Environmental Pillar from the Ministry of the Environment and Spatial Planning, Mr Bricelj, said that Slovenia had never had such a modern and internationally verified professional starting point for coastal and marine management and never in history had there been so much money available to fund agreed projects in the EUSAIR process.

Perhaps this is one of the reasons why the debate on the Spatial Maritime Plan has not been without controversy?

The spatial plan envisages a 150-meter coastal strip and an approximately 100-meter land strip to be determined by local communities. It is therefore logical that it has been the subject of lively public debate, since bringing long-term sustainable effects still affects many current, critical relationships. I often say that the Adriatic-Ionian Region covers almost 70 million people and that it is an area with many interests, so only cooperation can meet the needs and desires that we feel in this area.

Let me remind you of the Declaration adopted by entrepreneurs and craftsmen, scientists, researchers and representatives of local authorities of the four Slovene municipalities along the Slovene sea at the problem conference “Sea, who will love you” on 27 May 2019. In it, we wrote that in the field of spatial planning and environmental protection, we expect that the Ministry of the Environment and Spatial Planning will significantly accelerate activities in the preparation of an umbrella document for the sea. *“We can’t have everything everywhere on little more than 40 kilometres of the sea coast, so we need to determine the purpose of individual parts of the sea,”* the declaration reads. We advocated an important role for all four municipalities located by the sea. We therefore established the Council for the Slovene Adriatic. When we asked the government to set up a working body and prepare a document, we were in fact anticipating spatial maritime plans. We wrote that *“it must be clear to everyone where the sea belt is intended for economic activities, where the areas are intended for tourism, where we can place shellfish and fish farms, how much sea and where we will protect.”* We also clearly expressed the expectation that the government and the National Assembly of the Republic of Slovenia would propose solutions that will have the consent of local communities. We are again at the priorities of Blue Growth in Slovenia!

How important is governance of maritime space in relation to the Blue and Green Corridors?

The 6th Forum repeatedly emphasized the exceptional importance of the Green Deal – not only as “code” for a breakthrough project of the European Union, but also as a solution to some specific problems of our region. One of the models for achieving the goals of the Green Deal, which can be implemented by all EUSAIR countries, is the implementation of Blue and Green Corridors, the essence of which is eco-connectivity at the Macro-regional level. The key process in the implementation of the Blue and Green Corridors is the preparation of maritime spatial plans, which must be prepared by all countries for the first time in the history of the EU.

So I think it is not too ambitious to say that spatial maritime plans are one of the foundations of the realization of the Green Plan, and the Blue and Green Corridors are a measure of their success. These are activities in which cooperation with neighbouring countries is in Slovenia’s strategic interest.

In inter-pillar cooperation, we also come to “our” EUSAIR Facility Point project, which we successfully anchored in Izola and, together with the Lead Partner, Government Office for Development and European Cohesion Policy, increased the efficiency of the preparation of inter-pillar projects. One of the important legacies of the Slovene Presidency, therefore, and especially the 6th Forum, is the realization that we need to continue to have such an anchorage.

Can you tell us in a little more detail what the maritime spatial plan of Slovenia includes? The similarity of the name with more established spatial plans, e.g., municipal spatial plans, is certainly not accidental.

The draft was initially prepared by the Department of Geography of the Faculty of Arts, University of Ljubljana, on behalf of the Ministry of the Environment and Spatial Planning. It is primarily aimed at sustainable spatial planning and protection against irreversible interventions. It should be understood as an action plan of the strategy and a mandatory starting point for all interventions in the area directly adjacent to the sea. The Ministry of the Environment and Spatial Planning commented on the proposal, and until March of this year it was in public discussion, especially active here of course in Istria. There was a rush in March because the MSP

had to be sent to the European Commission in accordance with the Integrated Environmental Assessment Directive. It is expected to be revised at least every 10 years in the future.

So we’re going in the right direction?

I’m an optimist. Although short, our Adriatic coast places us among Mediterranean countries. Our own activity has already shown our worth in the wider Adriatic-Ionian Region, so I also support a stronger focus on Slovenia as a Mediterranean country. We are aware of the advantages that the Mediterranean location allows us: from the cradle of civilization through an exceptional geostrategic location to a stunning natural and cultural heritage. We may still be looking for a “European way of life”, but the Mediterranean lifestyle and Blue Growth are recognized European values - and at the same time development niches that we must know how to use as levers in the future. Now that ten EUSAIR countries are looking for the way of the future, the Blue and Green corridors, the sails of sustainable development and the rainbow of sustainable tourism, they will all be able to look at the Izola Declaration together.

Designing high quality gastronomic products

Interview with **Dean Kocijančič**,
director of Izola Tourist Association

In September 2020, all four coastal municipalities, Piran, Izola, Koper and Ankaran, presented a new joint brand *Love Istria*. How was the idea of acting together born?

All the coastal municipalities have always been closely connected because of the common history and tradition of the area of Slovene Istria. The tourist market is very complex and each destination strives to attract as many guests as possible. In doing so, they have the advantage of destinations that can offer tourists a diverse and high quality experience. Given that the area of Slovene Istria is relatively small and is mainly perceived by foreign guests as a single destination, the connection between coastal tourist organizations makes sense for further development. The *Love Istria* brand was created in 2017, and in 2020 we further upgraded it with a new corporate identity, which combines the basic symbols of Slovene Istria: the sun, the sea, Venetian architecture and the green countryside.

What can you offer more under a common brand than if you were to appear on the market individually?

By working and appearing together, we're certainly stronger and more efficient. Foreigners in particular see the area of Slovene Istria as unified and with the help of a common brand we are more recognizable for foreign markets. Due to the small distances between places in our area, guests can visit and see different points in coastal towns and the hinterland in a relatively short time, so it is important that we ensure quality and competitive products all together. The goal is to offer high quality products and experiences that connect the cultural heritage, tradition and local products in an innovative and attractive way. The most important goal in the field of designing new integrated tourist products is to include unique, authentic and high quality tourist products in the 5-star experience of the macro-destination Mediterranean Slovenia, since this is a unique opportunity to increase visibility and a more successful positioning of Slovene Istria in the tourist market. Under the auspices of the brand, we prepare joint promotional content, organize joint appearances, especially abroad, manage and promote the destination on social networks and participate in other forms of promotional activities of the destination Slovene Istria. We also find it especially important to communicate with the specialized public, so together we organize visits for study groups and regularly prepare messages for the media.



The basic orientation of Slovene tourism is sustainable development. In what ways does your Love Istria brand fit into the national strategy?

The Slovene Tourist Board focuses its activities on the promotion of Slovenia as a green, boutique destination, which offers unique 5-star experiences for demanding guests, with an emphasis on authentic and indigenous experiences. Slovene Istria certainly offers many opportunities for authentic experiences and activities, which we will further upgrade in the future. We are implementing the idea of seasonalisation with various projects through which we also connect closely with local stakeholders and the tourism industry. One of them, for example, is the *Enjoy the Countryside* project, which is resulting in a common register of thematic trails, such as hiking, cycling and equestrian. In the Maristra project, the emphasis is on raising the quality of the gastronomic offer of Slovene Istria and the joint promotion and marketing of Istrian gastronomy. The rich cultural heritage of the area of Slovene Istria is also undoubtedly a great advantage, which we revive by creating various experiences and events. We also include elements of the cultural heritage in innovative tourist products with more modern digital approaches, thus making sure we preserve the identity of the area, while strengthening its visibility.

One of the goals of the EUSAIR pillar "Sustainable Tourism" is a more innovative tourist offer by promoting sustainable and responsible development within the region. How does your Maristra project achieve this goal?

The Maristra project is one of the currently active projects, with which we strive to establish a high quality and highly competitive product based on Istrian gastronomy, which provides an infrastructure for stakeholder networking, the development of an innovative and comprehensive offer of local products, joint promotion and marketing of Istrian gastronomy and tourist services, and encouraging a high-quality offer. The integration and design of quality gastronomic products will increase the number of visitors to the destination and their consumption. As a result, the latter will be reflected in a general increase in the quality of the offer and tourist services in the destination.

What have local providers and growers gained from the Maristra project?

With the project we want to raise the quality of gastronomic products and tourist services in the area of LAS Istra. To this end, training courses are being held for providers, which will undoubtedly help to create a high-quality offer. Particular attention will be paid to promotion. The activities will connect providers in the LAS area, contribute to greater recognition of Istria as a gastronomic destination and, consequently, to higher consumption by visitors.

The Adriatic-Ionian Region includes destinations that are synonymous with tourism in the minds of Europeans and the world: Italy, Greece, Croatia ... slightly more niche also Montenegro, Albania, Slovenia ... What competitive advantage do sustainable products have within such a sharp market?

Covid-19 is the biggest tourism crisis to date. The proportion of those who will still be able or willing to travel will decrease for both health and economic reasons. The attitude towards travel, the choice of destinations and the type of accommodation will also change. When the borders are reopened, the fight for tourists will be exceptional, with a stronger focus on the domestic market and nearby markets within a distance of up to 500 km. Due to their geographical location, Slovenia and Istria have the opportunity to obtain car-distance tourists, which, due to Covid-19, is the main direction for the definition of the primary foreign market. We will address tourists in the 500 km belt of one of the most developed European regions: Friuli Venezia Giulia, Lombardy – Italy, Bavaria – Germany, Carinthia, Styria – Austria. At the same time, within the car distance zone, we will address the metropolises with high purchasing power Vienna, Munich, Milan. Because of Covid-19, the purchasing behaviour of tourists and their values have changed significantly, so sustainable products will be even more important than before. Products based on contact with nature are local and seasonal and will in particular gain in value and will sell well. An experiential experience and outdoor activities will be sustainable products with the highest level of demand. In the post Corona period, the competitive advantages of Slovenia and Istria are that they are considered a green, active and healthy destination. We must not forget the boutique in terms of the individualism and unique experience that Slovenia and Istria have, while the tourism big powers will find individualism and green tourism a major challenge in view of the development of mass tourism in the past.

How does one make plans for the future during Covid-19? What do you think will be key to recovery after the end of the pandemic?

Confidence in recognizable destinations will certainly be crucial, and Slovenia and Istria are increasingly recognized destinations on the world tourist map. Proof of this is the awards that Slovenia has gained in recent years on a global scale as a green, active and healthy destination for 5-star experiences. It will be important for our guests to feel safe, with Covid measures also playing an important role. Attitudes towards travel will change. Tourists will opt for shorter trips, closer to home and will choose destinations that are accessible to them by car. There will also be important outdoor activities that we perceive as safer, experiential experiences, in-depth trips in which the tourist connects with the local community and experiences more in fewer locations, whereby a strong connection of the tourism industry with the local community is essential.

The above elements, which are crucial for recovery, are achievable and feasible in Slovenia and Istria, given the history and organization of tourism.



»European power system is one of the most sophisticated machines in the world«

Interview with **Uroš Salobir**,
Director of the Strategic Innovation Department,
ELES, d.o.o.



The Adriatic-Ionian Region, given its climatic characteristics, seems a paradise of sun and wind. How green is the Adriatic-Ionian Region really in terms of energy?

It's certainly green. However, the return on investment in renewable energy sources is not only dependent on climatic conditions and investment resources, but also the region's ability to penetrate other regions in Europe with its energy. And, of course, that it is able to transfer energy from these regions back when the system conditions require it. In the Adriatic-Ionian Region, in order to achieve this goal, it is necessary to ensure the resilience of the network through investments, new market mechanisms and innovations, which will be able to implement the above.

What good practices in the field of integration of new dispersed resources can Slovenia offer to countries of the region?

The Slovene electricity network is very well connected with neighbouring countries, so it is a strong hub among some of the most important regional electricity markets. Compared to the electricity networks of other European countries, it is relatively small, so of course what is happening on it also strongly depends on what is happening in the neighbouring networks. Strong international involvement and the ability to create major national projects quickly are our comparative advantages.

The main motivation for designing two major international demonstration projects (*SINCRO.GRID* and *FutureFlow*) was to address regional challenges related to the integration of larger amounts of renewables into the grid and to provide sufficient flexibility resources needed to regulate the electricity system. In the *NEDO* project, with the inclusion of a large number of Slovene partners and the establishment of a system of integrated and centrally managed cloud solutions, we actually introduced a smart grid at the national level. After all this, Slovenia has a lot of experience in testing new technological solutions and implementing demonstrations or pilot projects, which can then be used at the regional or European level.

How would you summarize your key experiences from participating in the European Commission-funded *MIGRATE* project through Horizon 2020?

The *MIGRATE* project was constructed and carried out due to fundamental changes in the technical characteristics of the future interconnected system.



Foto: Samo Vidic

MIGRATE highlights the fact that we must not forget that European electricity grid is one of the most sophisticated machines in the world. Even in this system, though, there is a point at which the system can surprise us, operate outside the expected range and cause, in the worst case, disintegration. These breakups are not something out of the ordinary, distant. At the very beginning of January, we witnessed in Europe the separation of the entire European network, which took place in this region. High shares of wind and solar energy also require deep reflection on all past acquisitions of electricity, which seemed to us self-evident from the point of view of a high standard of security of supply.

With GEN-I, you formed a consortium to accelerate green transformation. What are the advantages of such connections?

We established a consortium to accelerate green transformation of the Slovenian electricity sector with GEN-I because we are aware that in order to achieve decarbonisation targets by 2050, it is essential to connect stakeholders from the energy sector. A key part of the green transformation is also focusing on users, meeting their expectations and empowering them to

participate actively in the electricity market. We are glad that three other electricity distribution companies have joined us on this journey so far – Elektro Celje, Elektro Gorenjska and Elektro Ljubljana. Participation in the consortium allows us not only to be informed about developments in the field of consumption and diversified production, but also to understand the tendencies and motivations of customers that will affect a range of policies, rules and investments in the future.

What opportunities does the European Green Deal present for ELES?

In addition to all past trends, the Green Deal has enabled us to seize opportunities in the field of cross-sectoral integration, thus the integration of electricity, heat, gas, transport ... and the treatment of the energy system as a whole. We have established cooperation with the aforementioned sectors at ELES. We are already designing research and innovation projects with some of them and discussing possible demonstrations.



»We produce oil from olives growing in the port area«

Interview with **Dimitrij Zadel**,
President of the Management Board,
The Port of Koper

With the project “We take care of your cargo, you take care of your health”, you won first prize for the best good practice of Covid-19 communication. How else did the pandemic mark last year in the Port of Koper? What challenges did you face?

The new coronavirus pandemic had a major impact on global trade flows last year, which was also felt in the Port of Koper, for example in product groups related to the automotive industry, raw materials, metal products, components and, finally, finished products. We thus ended 2020 with a total throughput of 19.5 million tons of goods, which is 14% less than the year before. Nevertheless, we are satisfied with the result, since we managed to maintain almost the same quantities for containers in the field of strategic cargo. Vehicle throughput also gradually improved in the second half of the year.

We did not have any major consequences in the team due to the pandemic, since we successfully curbed the spread of the virus through numerous measures, especially by informing and raising the awareness of our employees. We must not forget that port infrastructure is of strategic importance to the country, so we cannot afford to stop work in the port.

The EU strategy for the Adriatic-Ionian Region promotes the development of intermodal transport. Is the expansion of the container terminal part of the effort in this direction?

It is true that the Port of Koper is following the strategy and strengthening the container and car terminal with investments. Last year, we handed over a new RO-RO berth (berth for ships with cars), an additional group of tracks at the car terminal, a new garage house, a new, third truck entrance to the port and the extension of the first pier or container terminal, which is the most important investment within the current strategic business plan. We have bet our future on rail links. Already today, almost 60% of all goods arriving or leaving the port travel by rail, which is one of the highest percentages among European ports.

As the junction of two important European transport corridors, the Adriatic-Baltic and the Mediterranean, the Port of Koper is recognized as one of the core ports of the European Union. You also have great connections to the hinterland. How do you assess the current transport connections in the Adriatic-Ionian region? Where do you see the biggest development opportunities?

Despite the various modes of transport, competition between ports today is in fact taking place on the railways. When logisticians choose ports today, the key decision-making factor is the rail link to the hinterland.



It is essential how to bring large quantities of goods to the destination as quickly and cheaply as possible. From the history of the Port of Koper, it can be seen that throughput in Koper increased exponentially after 1967, when the current track was built. Examples from abroad also show how other ports are developing in parallel with the development of the railway network. Trieste and Rijeka are also aware of this and are investing in the railway connection of ports with the hinterland. At the moment, the Port of Koper has primacy among the northern Adriatic ports – and by building the second railway track to the port, we will maintain this primacy.

What do you expect from the Port of Koper from the long-awaited construction of the second track of the railway connection?

The Port of Koper depends on reliable and fast transport connections with the hinterland, so an additional railway connection is even more necessary. If there were no second track and when the current line, which is obsolete and unsuitable for today's needs, reaches its maximum capacity, cargo would accumulate in the port. Large customers providing large quantities of cargo would divert this elsewhere. The Port of Koper would thus lose its competitive advantage and transshipment would stagnate in the long run.

Unfortunately, the speed, knowledge and flexibility of the wider port team is not enough for the cargo to reach its destination quickly and reliably, so we want the second track to be built on time, since our strategic plan is tied to this. We must be aware that competing ports will not stand still forever, which is already evident in their extensive investment in the development and construction of road and rail connections.

You are a member of NAPA (North Adriatic Ports Association). What are the synergies of such connections between competing ports from different countries?

The association strives to increase the visibility of the northern Adriatic in overseas markets. We try to achieve this by cooperating in the fields of promotion, lobbying, security, protection and the environment and, of course, European projects. Together, we also find it easier to represent common interests and assert the importance of our ports at the highest level of communication with the EU institutions. A great joint success, for example, is the Brussels decision to recognize the ports of the northern Adriatic as EU nuclear ports.

We thus connect the northern Adriatic to a recognizable port system that rivals and competes with northern European ports. As the shortest, fastest and cheapest connection between the Middle and Far East and Central and Eastern European markets, the northern Adriatic is a competitive destination only if the port system is reliable as a whole.

You have a special portal for sustainable content and projects. What are your plans in the field of sustainable connections and what opportunities does the European Commission's Green Deal present for the Port of Koper?

At the beginning of this year, we adopted the Strategy of Sustainable Development and Social Responsibility of the Port of Koper, in which we gathered our activities and goals in the field of care for employees, our customers, the natural environment and the wider local community. We want to maintain a balance between economic demand and environmental responsibility and social engagement. We understand this and do it more broadly than required by law, so to a large extent and in many areas, we are already successfully addressing the fundamental goals of the Green Deal. We procure environmentally friendly machines, eliminate or reduce port impacts on the environment from the outset, handle natural resources carefully and invest in the use of renewable energy sources, reduce the carbon footprint and improve energy efficiency, monitor the marine ecosystem and much more. At the same time, we must not forget the symbol of our ecological orientation, olive oil, which we produce every year from olives growing in the port area. There are already almost 300 of these trees.

Our business partners are also investing more and more in green logistics, so they appreciate our commitment to remain a green port.

What role will digitalisation play in connecting the region?

In the field of digitalisation and digital transformation, the Port of Koper will work in the direction dictated by industry trends: the introduction of automated work processes and an expansion of the use of new technologies such as the Internet of Things and blockchain. Speaking of ports in the region, digitalisation will speed up the process of building a single customs entry window, which will be a great benefit for both shipowners and port operators.

6th EUSAIR Forum

The Adriatic-Ionian Initiative as a factor of integration, cooperation and stability and a political basis for EUSAIR

As part of a wider European effort to strengthen regional cooperation in the post-Cold War period, a key initiative for enhanced cooperation in the Adriatic and Ionian Region emerged from the Stability Pact for South Eastern Europe, established in 1999. This was a framework aimed at strengthening peace, democracy, human rights and the economies of the countries of South Eastern Europe. On this basis, the Italian Government presented **the Adriatic-Ionian Initiative** at the Tampere European Council in Finland in October 1999, and it was formally established by the signing of the Ancona Declaration in May 2000, in Ancona.

This was the political basis for strengthening Adriatic-Ionian territorial cooperation and for promoting political and economic stability, thus laying a solid foundation for European integration processes. The statement was originally signed by the foreign ministers of Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Greece, Italy and Slovenia, and was later joined by Serbia, Montenegro, North Macedonia and San Marino.

In the Ancona Declaration, the participating countries identified areas of common interest: economic cooperation, transport and maritime cooperation, environmental protection, tourism, culture, science and education, the fight against illegal activities and interparliamentary cooperation. The parliamentary dimension emphasizes the importance of parliamentary cooperation, with the role of national parliaments as citizens of the closest institutions.

In order to organize and monitor activities and projects and ensure their continuity, the countries have set up a Permanent Secretariat based in Ancona to assist participating countries, regional authorities and local authorities in implementing projects and developing cooperation. The operation of the Permanent Secretariat is financed by the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

The decision-making body is the Council of the Adriatic-Ionian Initiative at the level of Ministers of Foreign Affairs, which meets once a year. The Committee of High Representatives meets three times a year, and round tables are the central form of activity at the level of experts from the participating countries. They involve representatives of the economy, civil society and the research sphere, as well as the parliaments of the Member States, thus putting subsidiarity into practice as one of the fundamental principles of EU activity.

Several institutional cooperation networks have been activated in support of cohesion and competitiveness in the Adriatic-Ionian Region, such as the Adriatic and Ionian Euroregion, the Adriatic and Ionian Cities Forum, the Adriatic-Ionian Chamber of Commerce Forum and the Uniadriion University Forum.

In 2014, the European Council, on a proposal from the European Commission and on the initiative of Italy, adopted the **European Union's Macro-regional Strategy for the Adriatic-Ionian Region (EUSAIR)**, which upgrades the presented political activity into even deeper cooperation, though which does not envisage additional bodies or funds but deeper cooperation and coordination of existing EU funds and mechanisms. The areas of activity are the same and the Presidency of the AII and EUSAIR is simultaneous and complementary in content.

In the initiative, Slovenia acts as a developed Mediterranean and maritime country and takes the view that cooperation in this framework should focus in particular on issues related to the sea and the coastal zone. In particular, the importance of respecting mutual commitments, good neighbourly relations and equal cooperation of all partners without exclusion is emphasized. During its Presidency, Slovenia paid special attention to infrastructural connections, the promotion of cooperation in the field of science and culture, tourism and youth issues.

Slovenia chaired the Adriatic-Ionian Initiative from 1 June 2020 to 31 May 2021, which is its third Presidency so far. At the same time, this was the first time that the same country is also chairing the EU Council immediately afterwards. The Slovene simultaneous Presidency of the AII and EUSAIR ended with a joint ministerial conference and the adoption of the Izola Declaration.

Milan Jazbec, Ambassador,
Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Slovenia

DAY 1

Tuesday, 11 May 2021

11.15–12.00

OFFICIAL OPENING
OF THE 6th FORUM

WELCOME ADDRESS:

Danilo Markočič,
Mayor of the Municipality
of Izola

OPENING ADDRESSES:

- **Anže Logar**,
Minister of Foreign Affairs
of the Republic of Slovenia
- **Elisa Ferreira**,
EU Commissioner for
Cohesion and Reforms
- **Zvone Černač**,
Minister for Development
and the EU Cohesion Policy
of the Republic of Slovenia

WELCOME SPEECH BY THE MAYOR OF THE MUNICIPALITY OF IZOLA DANILO MARKOČIČ

Honourable minister, dear guests, participants of the 6th Forum of the EU Strategy for the Adriatic and Ionian Region,

I would be much happier if all thousands of you could be hosted in Izola – because that would mean that we had all come out of the world's biggest epidemic safely. Our seas knew the first quarantines, our capitals are the cradle of European civilization – and we are still shaken to the core by a single microscopic virus. That's why it's right to connect, to learn from each other, to help each other – and move on.

Both in Izola and in Slovene Istria, we understand Macro-regional Strategies as a path to a better common future. We were therefore proud when the Slovene Presidency decided that the Izola Public Institute for the Promotion of Entrepreneurship and Development Projects of the Municipality of Izola would become the operational platform for the EUSAIR Facility Point. We were thus involved daily not only in work with Slovene ministries, but also with many of you from all nine countries, which was already excellently demonstrated during the Mediterranean Coast Week in September.

The 6th Forum that we are opening today is a continuation and culmination of this one-year collaboration. What makes me especially happy is that it has been adopted by citizens of all generations. Distinguishing among the large number of European acronyms is not self-evident, but I tell you that the women and men of Izola also know what EUSAIR means today: they associate it with green sails, Blue Growth, smart energy and sustainable tourism.

This is how we have lived since time immemorial – so we can recognize who really cares about these values and such a future. We, the people of Izola, are especially proud that the achievements of the one-year Presidency and the foundations of future work will be written in the Declaration, which will bear the name of Izola. If anyone, then the people of Primorska know that no man is an island. Just last year's mandatory physical distance and frequent isolation taught us that we can only succeed together, closely connected to each other.

Thank you to the organizers for all the effort required by the hybrid nature of the Forum, and I wish all participants plenty of success. Good luck and see you again live!





OPENING ADDRESS BY ANŽE LOGAR, MINISTER OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS OF SLOVENIA

Honoured Colleagues, Excellences, Partners and Friends,
The great thing about Macro-regional Strategies is that they are open – open to the future and open to future partners. Let me start with some very concrete proof of such openness: we started our Presidency last June with a fresh new member, North Macedonia – and it is now clear that we will end the year of the Slovene Presidency with another new member, San Marino! Welcome!

How can one not be proud of such an incredible region, which unites two classical pillars of our civilisation, Athens and Rome; which gives equal floor and forum to Member States of the European Union and those countries that are on their way to joining; and, last but not least, that has neighbours from France to Turkey!

This is the privilege of the sea: the shores are safe, the waves are challenges, the horizons are wide open. What can we say about the year behind us? Historically marked by the most challenging pandemic of the century, it has forced us all to focus even more on our priorities: Green Connectivity; enlargement of our European Union, well connected and economically smart; a socially sensitive and environmentally friendly recovery. It is almost as if our four Macro-regional Adriatic-Ionian Pillars have spread across the borders of our region – and gained broader value.

It would not be the first time that, because of the incredible climatic conditions, educated and creative citizens and geo-strategic position, our shared sea, part of the Mediterranean, it has been a guiding light in dramatically dynamic times, providing safe haven in rough seas.

What have we achieved together to be able to look forward with optimism? Our *Izola Declaration* clearly lists our results, so I would dare to select for you only the key ones:

- We have finally succeeded in “putting our money where our mouth is” by clearly embedding our flagship projects into concrete funding programmes, European, regional and national, thus making many of our common projects not only possible but feasible;
- As part of our EU enlargement agenda, the Presidency initiated a consultation process to assess the relevance of EUSAIR flagships for the *Economic and Investment Plan and Green Agenda for the Western Balkans*. The process was tested in the areas of environment and transport connectivity for the flagships, to be implemented through IPA III support and significantly to contribute to a new growth model in the Western Balkans.
- Our thematic focus, Green Connectivity, has become a hub issue, not only through all four pillars of our Strategy, but also beyond. For example, eco-connectivity has been a source of cooperation with the Danube Macro-region through the establishment of blue corridors in shared riverine ecosystems. This proves the importance of coordinating cross Macro-regional Strategies.



- The Presidency facilitated, financially supported and initiated various forms of youth engagement: from Climate Change Challenges in the educational process to entrepreneurial thinking. National competitions (POPRI) for best entrepreneurial ideas took place in all EUSAIR countries – and we will be awarding the best ideas of tomorrow, well, literally tomorrow – on this same stage!
- And yes, for the first time we will be recognizing the efforts of our partners in the development of Macro-regional Strategies to contribute to the common good, by awarding *Windmills of Excellence*.

Dear colleagues and partners, I started with our openness – so let me also conclude with it. In less than two months, Slovenia will be presiding over the EU Council. We are teamed with two member states, Germany and Portugal, which links our Mediterranean heritage with the horizons of northern seas and the Atlantic Ocean. What better opportunity to broaden our Macro-regional perspectives to the European scale!

Our best practices can become our common policies, our local challenges can develop stronger tools to find solutions – and our regional legacies and heritage will once again be presented and, hopefully, accessible to the whole European family. When you are in the company of such tourist destinations as our members, our lessons and the openness of our borders and doors will be an important message of a serious, responsible post-covid recovery. Although I regret that we were unable to gather here in person on the Slovene coast, I sincerely hope that when our friends from Albania close the next Presidency, their Presidency, the beauty of our shared sea and the fresh breeze of Mediterranean air will remind us all what a wonderful part of the world we live in.

Let us take care of the coasts of our shared sea, let us work for the common good of our citizens, united in a strong and smart European Union.

Thank you.



The 6th EUSAIR Forum was conducted in accordance with the Covid-19 testing of all participants.

ELISA FERREIRA, EU COMMISSIONER FOR COHESION AND REFORMS

Cooperation among the countries around the Adriatic and Ionian Seas today is more important than ever before. Let me quote an old proverb that says: *"If you want to travel fast – go alone. But if you want to travel far – go together."* The trade-off between the quick wins of working alone and the long-term accomplishments of cooperation should always be kept in mind. Our Europe is experiencing far-reaching changes: Covid, first crisis and now recovery; the digital revolution; the transition to a circular and carbon-neutral economy. And we want to go far in meeting these challenges. So we must go together. There is no better way. You have achieved a great deal in the Adriatic and Ionian Strategy, but you should strive for even more cooperation.

I am very pleased about the inclusion of new members: North Macedonia in 2020; and today's initiative to bring in San Marino. Today's meeting is about going further, though. I would like to challenge you to do this in 3 ways.

First, in your revision of the Strategy.

The communication and action plan must take account of the new, post-Covid reality. This means leaving no region behind in the digital revolution. Since we are now doing our conferences and meetings online, we should also strive hard to digitalize as many other services as possible. The digital revolution has a long way to go and it is essential that we do this leaving no region behind. A revision of the strategy must also build on the European Green Deal. This is Europe's new growth strategy. We need more Sustainable Tourism, more nature protection, and more green mobility in local development and cross-border cooperation. Your joint project to build a cycling route along the coasts and beyond is a very good starting point.

The second way I challenge you to go further is in the embedding process.

For a Macro-regional Strategy to be successful, there must be functioning networks of Governing Authorities. Across the various EU funded programmes: the European Regional Development Fund; the European Maritime and Fisheries Fund; the pre-accession instrument (IPA); and, of course, Interreg programmes. These networks are a key prerequisite for success. So I urge you to mobilize all relevant administrations and stakeholders. The message that we are stronger together is central to Macro-regional Cooperation and to Interreg. We are not just implementing policies and projects, we are creating a real sense of European unity.

This brings me to the third challenge: preparing the path for our partner countries to take the next steps towards EU membership. This must of course be based on progress in all relevant fields, economic, social and political, and with a strong focus on the rule of law. I believe that working together at the various levels provided by this forum, will contribute to the European integration of the whole macro-region. In conclusion, let me again underline the importance of going together in order to achieve our goals. Working alone is not an option. I want to encourage you to strive at far-reaching changes to your Macro-regional Strategy. Changes that prepare the Adriatic and Ionian Region for the green and digital revolution.

Let us go far. Let us go – together.





**VIDEO-ADDRESS BY MINISTER ZVONE ČERNAČ,
GOVERNMENT OFFICE FOR DEVELOPMENT
AND EUROPEAN COHESION POLICY,
REPUBLIC OF SLOVENIA**

Dear participants of the 6th Annual EUSAIR Forum,

It gives me great pleasure to welcome you today in such large numbers. This reflects the growing awareness that it is only together that we can address the demanding, complex challenges in the areas of Blue Growth, Connectivity in the region, Environmental Quality and Sustainable Tourism. We have already made an important step: we have defined joint priorities and the process of embedding the relevant themes in the programmes is underway. Slovenia puts great emphasis on this exercise, acknowledging this is only the beginning. Much still needs to be done before we can start delivering in a coordinated way. That is why we need a constant and unending dialogue between the countries and the institutions.

I believe we are on the right track. Also, and primarily, thanks to the team of EUSAIR Facility Point, our first joint strategic project that provides constant support to this process. Allow me to take this opportunity to thank the nine EUSAIR Facility Point Project Partners for their work. As Lead Partner, Government Office for Development and European Cohesion Policy will continue to pursue key activities – capacity building, trust building and strong communication. At the same time, we will further encourage our partnership to adequately address common challenges and needs.

We will pool knowledge and innovations in the region and support youth involvement for the young to help us weigh our actions. That is the only way we can build foundations for a future where no one is left behind and everyone is given an opportunity. This vision guides my work, my colleagues' work, actions of our country as it holds EUSAIR Presidency and its future actions. These are the core values on which Slovenia is willing to lead the partnership of Support to the governance of the EU Strategy for the Adriatic-Ionian region, the EUSAIR Facility Point, in the new programming period.

Dear colleagues, I am sorry we cannot shake hands. Yet, I hope we will be able to bring a piece of Slovenia to your homes. I hope you will enjoy all Forum events and sincerely hope to meet you soon in person along the clean coasts of the shared sea.

I wish you all the best.

12.00–13.30

THE FUTURE OF THE ADRIATIC-IONIAN REGION

Inspirational Dialogue

- **Lučka Kajfež Bogataj**, 2007 Joint Recipient of Nobel Peace Prize
- **Boštjan Videmšek**, European Climate Pact Ambassador, author of Plan B: How Not to Lose Hope in the Times of Climate Crisis

Lučka Kajfež Bogataj is the most prominent Slovene climatologist, whose field of expertise is agro-meteorology. She is a researcher and professor at the University of Ljubljana and played a crucial role as a member of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), where she worked on special report impacts, adaptation and vulnerability issues. The IPCC group and former US Vice President Al Gore Jr. were awarded the Nobel Peace Prize for their efforts to build and disseminate more knowledge about human-induced climate change. When it comes to dealing with the modern challenges of humanity, Ms. Kajfež Bogataj is one of the most prominent and eloquent voices from our region. She was included in the group of women who inspire Europe in 2012 and since then she has never stopped impressing with her knowledge and positive energy.

Boštjan Videmšek is an award-winning and versatile Slovene journalist and author with a wide range of interests. He made his name as a war correspondent for the most influential Slovene daily newspaper, Delo, but his articles soon made their way into the most prominent international media, including *The New York Times*, *Le Figaro*, *Der Spiegel*, *The Guardian*, *Forbes* and *the BBC*. He has published several award-winning books on 21st century conflicts and on the modern exodus of refugees and migrants. In his recognisable style, he revives the dying art of the long-form feature or reportage. In recent years, his journalistic focus has shifted to the impact of climate change and the green energy development boom around the globe. In his latest book, *Plan B*, Slovenia's 2020 Book of the Year, Videmšek explores the crisis of climate change by identifying ingenious, novel ways with which people around the world have taken effective steps to address it. It is an optimistic look at a pessimistic subject, inspired by his friend and colleague, photographer Matjaž Krivic, another award-winning Slovene reporter with a huge international reputation. Many see "Plan B" as an inspiration and a reference book for a long time in the future.



THERE'S NO PLANET B!

Lučka Kajfež Bogataj: *As a professor at the University, it's a my privilege to work with young people. They are actually my inspiration. When you work as a professor, you never get old – and you're more open to accept changes. So this is number one inspiration. (...) It's fantastic how much they know.*

My second inspiration is diversity: not just diversity in nature, but also diversity in people. It's wonderful to meet dfferent cultures, it's wonderful to learn from them – and it's wonderful to cooperate.

Boštjan Videmšek: *My book is a kind of manual: it offers solutions. After all these years of covering conflicts and refugee issues, I have no more capacity for human tragedy. So I've decided as a journalist, as a human being, to give something back. I now believe in something called "constructive journalism". And I'm trying to use all my experience and knowledge to find solutions. Going around with photographer Matjaž Krivic, a super optimist, I was infected by his virus of naivity, and finding people who were fighting the climate crisis with solutions was super inspiring. They don't let you to say "It's impossible" – because they show you it is possible.*

Lučka Kajfež Bogataj: *We're seeing less mass tourism in our Mediterranean area. People understand that they can make their destination more profitable not by adding more and more people, but adding more quality. This is something I find quite advanced. (...)*

Boštjan Videmšek: *The Greek island of Tilos is absolute proof that the future can be different. It's a perfect mixture of the development of technology and a change in the social paradigm. First, a young doctor came to the island and started everything from grassroots. He created very strong social tissue. It then became the first island in the Mediterranean to be self-sustainable, reliant only on renewable energy: photovoltaic, solar and wind. They were never shy to point out that this is also a business model.*

Lučka Kajfež Bogataj: *We live in quite complicated times. This covid-situation was not wasted time. My advice is innovation. But technology is not everything. We need new institutions. In my view this is extremely important, because even on the level of the United Nations, these institutions are old. They were made for different problems in different times. Even universities: have they followed the changes over time? Today, my students can get all information: but they desperately need a professor to tell them what is fake news, what is actually useful and what is garbage. Parliament – the same thing. So we need new institutions, new infrastructure. Let's make them green. Most important of all: we have to invent new life-styles. GDP is not enough, GDP is old, so last millennium. There are new measures of success.*

Boštjan Videmšek: *An agenda fully based in the future, not the past. Young people will be the core victims of the climate crisis. Give them the chance to lead now. To make a huge step forward, we need a smooth and fast transition from reflex to reflection. And I don't see this potential in politics, because the work of politics is based on a strategy of the reptile part of our brain – reflex. We need reflection – and this belongs to young people.*

14.30–15.50

**TOWARDS A GREEN
AND CIRCULAR ECONOMY
IN THE ADRIATIC AND
IONIAN REGION**

Panel discussion:

- **Peter Grk**, National Coordinator for Western Balkans, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Slovenia
- **Ladeja Godina Košir**, Director of Circular Change & Chair of the European Circular Economy Stakeholder Platform, Slovenia
- **Aleš Gnamuš**, Senior Policy Analyst, Joint Research Center of the European Commission
- **Tomaž Rodič**, Director, Centre of Excellence for Space Sciences and Technologies Space-SI, Slovenia
- **Denis Jahić**, General Manager, AquafilSlo, Slovenia
- **Marija Raspopović**, Senior Advisor, Chamber of Economy of Montenegro, BlueFasma Interreg MED Programme
- **Roberto Sandrini**, Project Manager, Technology Park Ljubljana, Circular 4.0 Interreg Alpine Space

**CAN RADICAL COLLABORATION ENABLE
SYSTEMS TRANSFORMATION?**

Peter Grk: *Slovenia is going to take over the Presidency of the EU Council from the 1st of July. One of the most important priorities of Slovene Foreign policy is EU enlargement to the Western Balkans, not because we are an altruistic country, but because this region is vital for our stability and prosperity. One of the symbolic things that we will do in Slovenia is an EU-Western Balkans summit in October 2021. Why is the Summit important? Because we can somehow streamline and synchronise all the activities that EU and WB countries are doing together. One of the things that is going to feature most prominently at the Summit is the whole agenda of connectivity, and especially the Green Agenda, meaning the transition from coal to green.*

Ladeja Godina Košir: *In the circular economy, we are aiming to maintain value as long as possible. We need to think about design. So as not to produce things that can't last. We want to get to the point at which waste is integrated into the system as a resource. We therefore need creativity, we need innovation, not only in products but also in services. Radical collaboration is of crucial importance. Each of us has knowledge, each of us is somehow integrated into a certain area – but we need a systemic approach. One sector or one country cannot solve problems alone: our continent is so small that we need to work hand in hand. Networks are the key. We are used to public governance, but without network governance, change cannot happen. Only with a combination of the two can we get tangible results.*



13.00–14.30

EUSAIR Pillar II

Connecting the Region session

(Transport sub-group)
Green and Smart transport solutions connecting the Adriatic and Ionian Region

Chair:

Pierluigi Coppola

Keynote address:

Alain Baron

Panellists:

- **Matej Zakonjšek**
- **Kurt Bodewig**
- **Georgios Vokas**
- **Domenico Gattuso**

09.00–10.30 (DAY 2)

EUSAIR Pillar II

Connecting the Region session

(Energy Networks sub-group)
Enhanced Cooperation for Green Energy Recovery and Resilience in the EUSAIR: Focus on Smart Grids and Hydrogen

Chair:

Janez Kopač

Keynote address:

- **Cosma Panzacchi**
- **Constantinos Papalucas**

Panellists:

- **Marcello Capra**
- **Gianluca Marini**
- **Nebojša Vučinić**
- **Milan Zdravković**

SUMMARY OF PILLAR CONCLUSIONS, PRESENTED AT THE PLENARY CLOSING SESSION

Pillar II

Connecting the Region – transport

Integrated railway and maritime solutions can and should contribute to the efforts towards low-carbon mobility. However, the investments should be accompanied by legislative and regulatory reforms to promote interoperability and common standards in services and safety.

- Railway transport could play a significant role in the transition towards low-carbon mobility and for the economic recovery and resilience of the Adriatic-Ionian Region.
- To take full advantage of such benefits, investment in infrastructure should be accompanied by legislative and regulatory reforms to promote interoperability and common standards in safety and level of service.
- Integrated railway and maritime solutions can contribute to efforts to reduce the overall external costs of transport. Accelerating the uptake of renewables and alternative fuels for vessels and ports is vital to achieving environmental sustainability.

Pillar II

Connecting the Region – energy

The share of technology innovation in smart power grids and hydrogen in the region would accelerate the recovery and transition towards a green economy and the Green Deal gives great potential in this respect.

Given the difficult context and the challenges ahead, a clear consensus emerged on the need to enhance energy co-operation within EUSAIR and beyond its borders to accelerate energy recovery and transition towards a green economy. Smart grids and hydrogen are two key assets and directions for moving towards a carbon-zero energy system. A green energy deal for the Adriatic and Ionian Region would provide EUSAIR Member States with opportunities for collaboration on smart power grids and hydrogen, to share technology innovation, business potential and converge on a common mission.

Pillar I

Blue Growth

There are many sustainable solutions on investments in research and innovation and the use of advanced green and digital technologies to boost sustainable Blue Growth.

The thematic session discussed strategies and presented multiple case studies from all EUSAIR countries that will strengthen sustainable solutions on investments in research and innovation and the use of advanced green and digital technologies to boost sustainable Blue Growth. The session was concluded with acknowledgement that cooperation established within the Adriatic Ionian Macro-region under the EUSAIR framework has proved to be a strong tool for identifying joint efforts and actions to transform into a sustainable blue economy in the area.



16.00–17.30

EUSAIR Pillar I

Blue Growth session

Sustainable Strategies for Blue Growth and Innovation

Chair:

- **Irene Tzouramani**
- **Milena Krsić**
- **Eleni Hatziyanni**

Welcome speech:

Ana Le Marechal

Keynote address:

Christos Economou

Panellists:

- **Maria Cristina Pedicchio**
- **Nikitas Nikitakos**
- **Jernej Švab**
- **Rigers Bakiu** and **Edmond Hala**
- **Nikola Vladimir**
- **Milica Mandić**
- **Irina Manevska**
- **Elena Banci**

DAY 2

Wednesday, 12 May 2021

09.00–10.30

EUSAIR Pillar III Environmental Quality session

Sustainable Use of Coastal & Marine Resources for a Healthy Future through Green and Smart Recovery

Chair and moderator:

• **Mitja Bricelj**

Key note address:

• **Senad Oprašić**

Panelists:

- **Konrad Stania** and **Dragan Zeljko**
- **Vedran Nikolić**
- **Alberto Barausse** and **Liliana Vižintin**
- **Stella Kyvelou**
- **Fabio Vallarola**
- **Brian Mac Sharry**

Pillar III Environmental Quality

Coastal and marine ecosystems of the Adriatic and Ionian Region are under growing pressure and impacts from land and sea. Protected Areas are an opportunity for a sustainable blue economy.

- Results of cross border cooperation in the Mura and Drava Commission has enhanced the ecological status, which is a concrete contribution to the Mura, Drava, Danube Biosphere Reserve. The Mura Forum is an innovative way for an honest dialogue with civil society and all interested stakeholders. The International Sava River Basin Commission is a sub-regional approach that connects five EUSAIR countries for enhanced water security in the shared river basin. The Sava youth parliament is a permanent structure within the International Sava River Basin Commission.
- Coastal and marine ecosystems of the Adriatic and Ionian Region are under growing pressure and impacts from land and sea. New development should respect green infrastructure and ecosystems services in shared ecosystems.
- Enhanced networking of coastal and marine protected areas is a challenge in marine spatial planning and an opportunity for a sustainable blue economy.
- Education for sustainable solutions on all levels is essential to enhance efficiency.



Pillar IV Sustainable Tourism

The synergy of tourism and culture can provide positive results, new energy and enthusiasm; initiate new ways of thinking that inspire sustainable and responsible development of the region. Through a variety of creative products, it will also have the power to rehabilitate societies and economies hurt by crises and pandemics.

- The embedding process should be fully utilised to strengthen tourism in the EUSAIR Macro-region through integrated sustainable destination management, based on multi-disciplinary knowledge, data, research, surveys and planning, innovation and multi-intelligence systems.
- EUSAIR has particular value in its unique authentic protected areas, areas of culture and nature. The synergizing capacity of tourism and culture can provide a positive impetus, new energy and enthusiasm; initiate new ways of thinking that inspire sustainable and responsible development of EUSAIR, and have the power to rehabilitate societies and economies fragmented by crises and pandemics, through a variety of transformative products, cultural routes and authentic storytelling.
- Recovery in EUSAIR should develop further through the embedding process for flagship projects in tourism, taking into account a fully participatory approach, inclusiveness and multilevel governance.



10.30–12.00

EUSAIR Pillar IV Sustainable Tourism session

From Crisis to Recovery through Transnational Tourism Projects Aiming at a sustainable Green Macro-region

Chair:

- **Slawomir Tokarski**
- **Natalija Havičić**

Moderator:

- **Nadine Lakhal**

Key note address:

- **Senka Daniel** and **Mislav Kovač**
- **Flaminia Santarelli**

Panelists:

- **Zamir Dedej**
- **Elia Apostolopoulou**
- **Irena Marš** and **Maša Klavora**
- **Gordana Djurović**
- **Alex Crevar**

15.15–16.00

PLENARY CLOSING SESSION

- **Monika Kirbiš Rojs**, State Secretary, Government Office for Development and European Cohesion Policy, Republic of Slovenia
- **Jean-Pierre Halkin**, Head of Unit Macro-regions, Transnational/Interregional Cooperation, IPA, Enlargement, European Commission
- **Olta Xhacker**, video message by Minister of Foreign Affairs of Albania
- **Pellumb Qazimi**, Ambassador of the Republic of Albania to Slovenia

MONIKA KIRBIŠ ROJS, STATE SECRETARY, GOVERNMENT OFFICE FOR DEVELOPMENT AND EUROPEAN COHESION POLICY, REPUBLIC OF SLOVENIA

Distinguished guests, dear colleagues, partners, friends, we have almost arrived at the end – of the 6th EUSAIR forum and of the Slovene Presidency of EUSAIR.

Slovenia is the seventh EUSAIR participating country to hold the EUSAIR and All Presidency. The whole period was marked by the Covid-19 pandemic, but we immediately adapted to the new reality. None of the planned events has been cancelled; even more, participation has actually increased via video links. We can be more than proud that almost 5,000 participants visited or actively participated in at least one of the more than 40 events that were held during the Slovene Presidency. In these events:

- We have reached consensus about the flagship priorities to be embedded into concrete funding programmes, European, regional and national; discussions among the different programmes are still ongoing.
- As part of our EU enlargement agenda, the Presidency initiated a consultation process to assess the relevance of EUSAIR flagships for the *Economic and Investment Plan and Green Agenda for the Western Balkans*.
- Our thematic focus, Green Connectivity, has become a hub issue, not only through all four pillars of our Strategy, but also beyond.
- The Presidency supported and initiated various forms of youth engagement: from Climate Change Challenges in the educational process and awareness raising to entrepreneurial thinking. National competitions (POPRI) for best entrepreneurial ideas took place in all EUSAIR countries. My congratulations to all competitors!
- The prizes for civil society ambassadors – *Windmills of Excellence* – were awarded.

However, I am here today to close the 6th Forum. A forum that has gathered 1000 registered participants, and at its side event B2B, it brought together more than 121 institutions, which have conducted 64 meetings. It has also gathered more than 40 students and their mentors who share concerns about our common future. With additional record number of 3,000 young contestants and their 1,000 mentors from educational institutions participating at EUSAIR POPRI events and All and ADRION programme side events joined by almost 400 people, forum and its side events were followed by ca 5,500 different groups of stakeholders! I am impressed and deeply honoured to be a part of this gathering. Let me sincerely thank all of those who were involved in preparation of the Forum: from national coordinators, pillar coordinators, thematic steering group members to the European Commission, the backstage scene setters – and also you, speakers and participants. Last but not least, let me thank the dream team of the EUSAIR Facility Point who are always there to find a way to move forward!

We say every end is a new beginning. For Slovenia, this end also means the new beginning of the chairmanship at the EU Council.

Stay strong, stay involved, stay healthy!





14.30–15.15

AWARD CEREMONY

Young POPRI Award

The awardees were announced by **Karin Žvokelj**, Deputy CEO of SPIRIT Slovenia, and **Tanja Kožuh**, CEO of Primorski tehnološki park.

AMAZING FIGURES

Members and participants of the EUSAIR Forum, students, ladies and gentlemen, it is both a great honour and a pleasure for me to stand here on the big stage and represent Primorski tehnološki park, and all the 9 technology parks with which we have closely cooperated over the last months. I'm happy because it was our great goal to organize an international competition of the best business ideas, and we succeeded. The POPRI competition developed as a local story and became a national, Slovene brand. It's much more than just young, enthusiastic students learning about business, it's a process by which technology parks, business communities with start-ups and companies, schools and policy makers, all go hand-in-hand to provide quality support to youth. It's a process by which all stakeholders learn from each other and, consequently, we all grow and develop.

You can imagine the EUSAIR POPRI youth event, which involved all the above institutions in all 9 countries of the Adriatic and Ionian Region. A separate learning process took place in each country, in which the best national ideas were identified and selected. In Slovenia alone, there were 134 participating teams, or 344 participants, involved in the selection process, and 58 mentors and 62 participating institutions. Multiply this number by 8 and you get amazing figures.

And here we are, at the final stage of the event. It's time for the announcement and for the awards. Before that, though, let me say again. I'm very proud of you, our students. Over the last two days we've heard your fantastic business ideas, your excellent presentations and your interest in learning. You are all winners.

I'd like to take this opportunity to thank all the institutions that have supported our work. It would take too long to mention them all and, anyway, I'd probably forget some. However, special thanks go to the European Commission and to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Slovenia, as well as to all technology parks and schools in the region.

Thank you very much. I really hope that we'll repeat this event next year! See you in 2022!

Tanja Kožuh,
CEO of Primorski tehnološki park

YOUNG POPRI WINNERS

The winning teams were **VISUS** among *high school students* and **Magnet Strap Winder** among *university students*, both from Slovenia. The winners of both categories will participate in a 14-day online seminar hosted by the California-based M Accelerator. The PODIM Start Up Conference in Maribor will be attended by the second and third placed teams: **Leaflife** from Italy and **VAH** from Serbia in the *high school students category*, **Vočaka** from Montenegro and **Eklinika** from Bosnia and Herzegovina in the *university students category*. Special recognition for the most creative "borderless idea" was given by the representatives of Nova Gorica and Gorizia as European Capital of Culture 2025. It was awarded to members of the **Bioneers** team from North Macedonia.



14.30–15.15

AWARD CEREMONY

Windmills of Excellence

The awardees were announced by **Andreja Jerina**, National Coordinator for Macro-regional Strategies, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Republic of Slovenia, and **Danilo Markočič**, Mayor of the Municipality of Izola.

WINDMILLS OF EXCELLENCE

The Windmill of Excellence is the EU Strategy for the Adriatic and Ionian Region (EUSAIR) award for those who have used their vast experience in the development of Macro-regional Strategies to contribute to the common good. Throughout the centuries, windmills in salt pans have been used to convert wind power to pump the saline water. The most famous were the windmills in the Fontanigge area of the Piran Salt Pans, where the legendary *"fleur de sel"* is still produced. The water, with a little help from the sun and wind, is thus transformed into salt – it is as if the four elements were reunited in the four sails of the stone windmill. Today, the traditional method of salt production is preserved as an important part of Slovenia's cultural heritage.

The 2021 Ambassadors of EU Strategy for the Adriatic and Ionian Region (EUSAIR) are:

GEORGE ALEXAKIS, GREECE

Vice-governor of Crete for European and International Affairs, Vice-president of the *Conference of Peripheral Maritime Regions of Europe* in charge of Maritime Affairs. He holds a Degree in Civil Engineering from the Democritus Technical University of Greece and Master of Science in Planning from the London School of Economics and Political Science. From 2001 until 2014, he was Chief Executive Officer of the Heraklion Port Authority, Crete, Greece.

Mr. Alexakis has been active in the prioritization of the flagship projects and the need to embed them into national and regional policies, taking full advantage of the European financial frameworks and programmes. He has succeeded in engaging the related parts of the local, regional and national economy and stakeholders, making them aware of the opportunities and future perspectives. Understanding the strong maritime dimension and potential for future development, Mr. Alexakis has launched an effective dialogue for the blue economy sectors and cross-sectorial objectives for the environment, tourism, connectivity and the territorial cohesion of the Adriatic Ionian Region.

BOJANA CIPOT, SLOVENIA

Holds a degree in political sciences from the University of Ljubljana. She gained vast experience in international cooperation as Minister Plenipotentiary in numerous diplomatic posts. In 2014, she joined the Slovene National Coordination Team for EU Macro-regional Strategies and significantly influenced the active participation of Slovenia in the Danube, Alpine and Adriatic-Ionian Strategies. Since 2019, she has been Head of International Cooperation and Project Management at *Primorska Technology Park*.

Ms Cipot has a strong belief in the new generations and their entrepreneurial spirit that will create a better tomorrow. She made an outstanding contribution to EUSAIR youth involvement through a national competition for entrepreneurial ideas of young people. With her broad understanding of Macro-regional cooperation, she has managed to expand the national POPRI competition to all EUSAIR participating countries through the networking of EUSAIR technological parks. Understanding transnational challenges, Ms Cipot inspires youth to connect based on knowledge and to create a better future.

MIRJANA ČAGALJ, CROATIA

Vice-president for Construction, Transport and Communications at the Croatian Chamber of Commerce. In 2017, she became president of the Forum of Adriatic-Ionian Chambers. She has been a member of the Parliamentary Committee for Construction, and since 2015 a member of the working group in the Office of the President of the Republic of Croatia for the non-systematic attraction of investments, in the Economic Council.

Ms Čagalj studied Civil Engineering at the University of Split. She has been actively participating in the work of the Adriatic-Ionian Region for years. She organized the 1st Joint Conference Forum of the Adriatic and Ionian Chambers of Commerce, Cities and Universities in Split in 2018. The conference brought together more than 120 institutions from the three civil society regional networks: Chambers of Commerce, Cities and Universities. Ms Čagalj then made it clear how much joint effort and close cooperation means for the overall progress of the region: *"The economy is a prerequisite for the development of cities and universities, and without educational staff, the economy could not turn."*

EMILIJA KASTELIC, SLOVENIA

Holds a PhD in the field of architecture from the University of Primorska. As project manager of EU funds, she has been involved in several projects in the Interreg, Adrion Programme, and Creative Europe programme. She gained her experience at the Scientific and Research Centre in Koper. She currently heads the Cultural Department at the *Institute for Youth, Culture and Tourism* of the Municipality of Koper–Capodistria.

Emilija has made an exceptional contribution to the work of EUSAIR TSG Environmental Quality since 2016. She has efficiently supported the coordinators of the pillar and the development of the first flagships of the EUSAIR project within the Environmental Quality Pillar. Moreover, Emilija also developed the first cross-pillar project involving the Quality of Tourism and was the first employee at the EUSAIR Facility Point Office in Izola to show the path of further development of the first generation of EUSAIR flagship projects.





MILENA KRASIĆ, MONTENEGRO

Holds a master's degree in the field of biodiversity. Her professional career has been devoted to the field of fisheries, from her bachelor's degree, through the Institute of Hydrometeorology of Montenegro, elementary school where she was a biology teacher, research at the Faculty of Natural Sciences, working in international consultancy, to the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development, where she met with EUSAIR. Milena still works for the Ministry as Head of the Fishing Fleet Resources and Management Department.

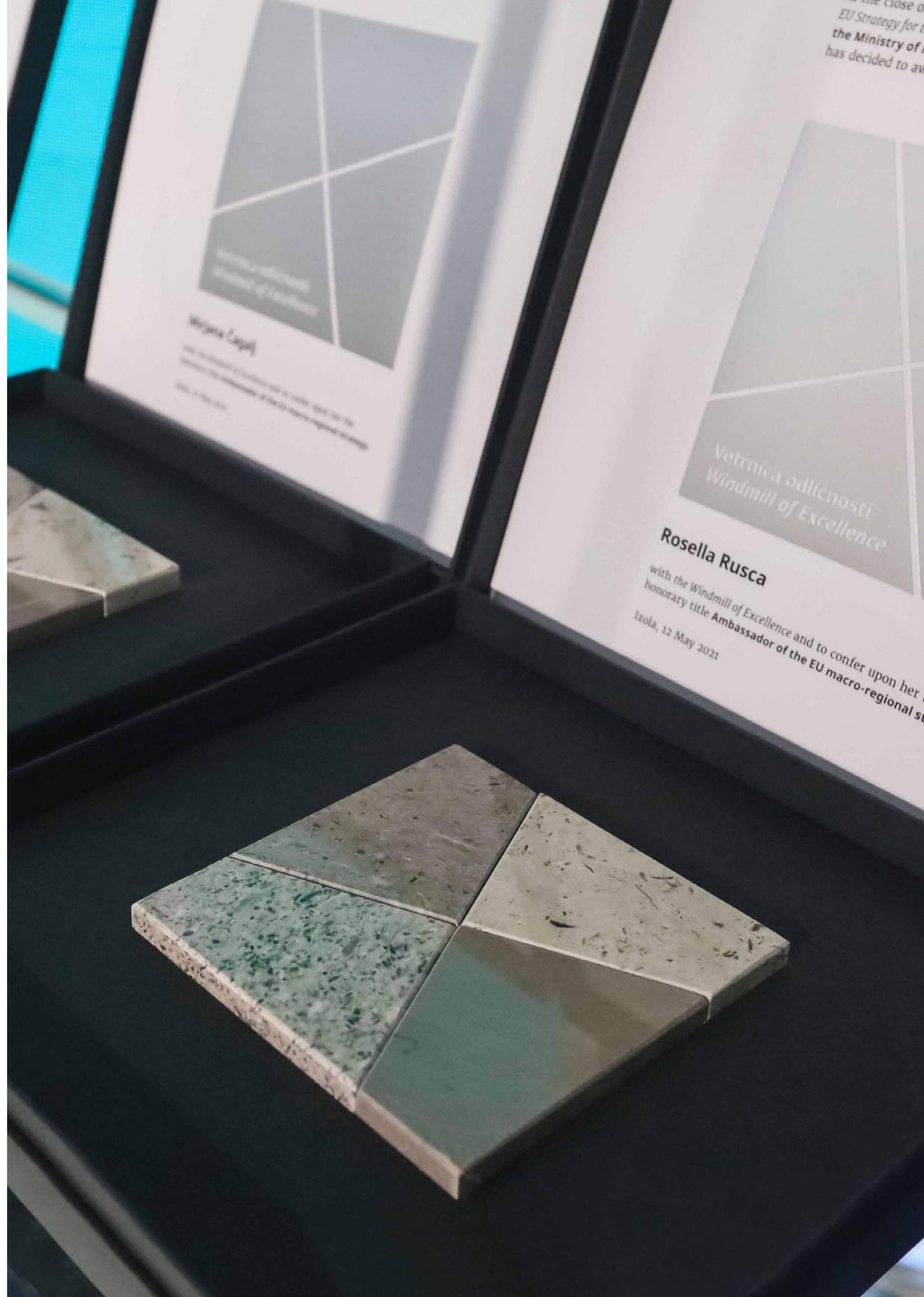
Milena has been involved in EUSAIR since its early stage – preparation and drafting of the Strategy, to which she contributed from the very beginning, both in the governance of the Blue Growth Pillar and in the governance of EUSAIR at the national level. During the Montenegrin EUSAIR Presidency, she was especially active in preparation of the 4th EUSAIR Forum, where a high-level panel and a thematic session were devoted to the field of Blue Growth – Aquaculture. She was the first Pillar 1 Blue Growth Coordinator from Montenegro, and she still makes an exceptional contribution to the work of EUSAIR TSG 1.



ROSSELLA RUSCA, ITALY

Holds a master's degree in architecture from La Sapienza – University of Rome. As Counsellor in the Permanent Representation of Italy to the EU from 2014 to 2019, Ms Rusca was responsible for Macro-regional Strategies. Since 2020, she has been an independent expert, in charge of assisting the city of Venice for participation in the Horizon Europe Mission "100 Carbon Neutral and Smart Cities by 2030".

She made an outstanding contribution from the very beginning of the EU debate about a Macro-regional approach in regional policy, and throughout her career as cohesion policy and territorial cooperation expert. In 2014, during the Italian Presidency of the EU, Ms Rusca chaired the Friends of the Presidency Group of the Council dedicated to Macro-regional Strategies, and prepared Council Conclusions on EUSAIR, adopted and endorsed in 2014. She has strongly supported the development of Macro-regional Strategies at EU and national levels, including their effective governance, their better embedding in programmes supported by EU Funds, and a wider and systematic analysis of their added value and results.



FORUM SIDE EVENTS

5 May

09.45–12.30

Many Generations – One Future!

<https://www.adriatic-ionian.eu/event/6th-annual-eusair-forum/side-eventmany-generations-one-future/>

11 May

10.00–19.00

B2B sessions

<https://www.adriatic-ionian.eu/event/6th-annual-eusair-forum/side-event-b2b/>



12 May

17.30–18.00

Installation of a »Keep the sea clean« sign

MANY GENERATIONS – ONE FUTURE!

Students, young researchers and their mentors/professors were invited to the webinar on 5 May to learn about EUSAIR and the cooperation offered within it. The purpose of the event was to prepare young participants to construct their messages properly and to be the voice of the future at the 6th EUSAIR Forum. The students and their mentors were also invited to present their initiatives and projects that are relevant to the region.

Staša Mesec, EUSAIR Facility Point Project Manager, Government Office for Development and European Cohesion Policy, Republic of Slovenia

B2B@EUSAIR FORUM 2021

A business networking event was held as part of the 6th EUSAIR Forum. The B2B@EUSAIR FORUM 2021 event was organized by the University of Primorska, a Slovene member of the *Enterprise Europe Network*, which attracted 35 business support organizations from 9 EUSAIR countries, who are also members of the *Enterprise Europe Network*, which promoted the event in the target countries and helped in recruiting participants.

The B2B event took place on 11 May 2021, as part of the first day of the 6th EUSAIR Forum. The event was attended by 121 participants from 17 countries. Among them were 55 companies, 16 representatives of universities, 11 NGOs, 9 start-ups, 6 representatives of agencies/associations, 5 research institutes, 5 representatives of government organizations, 3 freelancers and 11 other participants.

Ninety-four meetings were proposed to the participants, and 64 were actually held. According to the data collected so far, 8 business collaborations have been concluded between the participants, but we hope that the number of business collaborations will be slightly higher.

We believe that with the successful implementation of the virtual B2B event, we have made a constructive contribution to creating opportunities for business and technological cooperation among stakeholders from the Adriatic-Ionian Region and thus contributed to economic and social prosperity and growth in the EUSAIR region.

Sebastjan Rosa, Senior EU Project Manager, Faculty of Management, University of Primorska

STORY OF THE SIGNS »KEEP THE SEA CLEAN«

In the early 1990s, in the young Adriatic state of Slovenia, there was the desire and energy to establish responsible management of the coast and the sea. We were inspired by the Barcelona Convention (Convention for the Protection of the Mediterranean Sea and the Coast) and the United Nations Environment Programme/Mediterranean Action Programme (UNEP/MAP). The essence of the Barcelona Convention – the establishment of sustainable management of coastal and marine resources – was visualized with a stylized river and coast, typical

growth (pine) and healthy sea (symbol of fish) and the inscription “Protect the Sea” in Slovene, Italian and English. The main purpose: to raise the awareness of coastal users and municipal and state authorities about responsible management of the sensitive coastal and marine environment.

Signs on the coast were placed by representatives of the Ministry of the Environment and Spatial Planning, Koper Branch. The ceremonial unveiling of the first sign took place after the general restoration of the front embankment of Sečovlje salt pans, on the occasion of World Water Day, March 22, 1993. The purpose: to draw attention to the unique contact of fresh and sea water in the exceptional environment of cultural (salt) and natural heritage (Ramsar habitat). The ministry also commissioned a study for the preservation of natural parts of the Slovene coast, which became the professional basis for the work of the Institute for the Protection of Natural Heritage Piran (now based in Izola). It was on this basis that proposals were prepared for proclamation of the protected area of the Strunjan salt pans and the revitalization and protection of Škocjan Bay. At the suggestion of the Ministry of the Environment and Spatial Planning, UNEP/MAP also financed the removal of tens of tons of sediments from the Badaševica estuary, which were heavily contaminated with heavy metals due to the long-term operation of galvanizers in Tomos and other industrial facilities. UNEP/MAP also supported our proposal for the preparation of a Coastal Management Programme (CAMP Slovenia) and between 2005 and 2008 held a series of thematic workshops for representatives of municipal and state administration for integrated coastal management, led by distinguished international experts. Within the framework of this project, a Spatial Vision for the Slovenian coast was also developed, entitled “Quality in a thousandth of the Mediterranean».

The 14th session of the Parties to the Barcelona Convention was held in Portorož in 2005, at which we adopted the 1st Strategy for Sustainable Development of the Mediterranean and signed a Slovene-Italian-Croatian agreement on pollution prevention and management in the event of maritime accidents (*Contingency Plan N Adriatic*). During the Slovene Presidency of the Barcelona Convention (2005-2008), a modern *Protocol on Integrated Coastal Zone Management* (ICZM Protocol) was prepared and signed, which Slovenia was the first to ratify on 25 September 2009. Due to the exceptional importance of the ICZM Protocol for the preservation of healthy coastal areas of the Mediterranean, UNEP/MAP declared 25 September to be Mediterranean Coast Day. For the fifth year in a row, *Mediterranean Coast Day* in Slovenia has been celebrated in Izola as *Mediterranean Coast Week*, with a series of professional and social events taking place within the framework of the implementation of the EU Strategy for the Adriatic and Ionian Region (EUSAIR). In addition to organizing important events for comprehensive coastal management, the Municipality of Izola is particularly proactive in implementing concrete measures. Among the most important is the establishment of a green corridor between Koper and Izola, which has restored 1/10 of the coast to the people and relieved the narrowest coastal area of traffic pressures.

This “small step” in the EUSAIR process has had a major impact on accelerating the integration of the green and blue corridor content into EUSAIR cross-border development projects and integrating this content into *EU Spatial Planning at Sea*.

May the restored signs continue to have such an impact!

Mitja Bricelj

Coordinator of the EUSAIR Pillar III Environmental Quality, Ministry of the Environment and Spatial Planning of the Republic of Slovenia

Annex to Izola Declaration

ACHIEVEMENTS OF THE SLOVENIAN EUSAIR PRESIDENCY

Slovenia is the seventh EUSAIR participating country to hold the EUSAIR Presidency. The period of the Slovenian Presidency was marked by the COVID-19 pandemic, which significantly increased the challenges EUSAIR and EU are facing.

Meaningful governance

The extraordinary circumstances required a transition to online working methods, which were, with the timely engagement of the EUSAIR Stakeholders Platform, introduced without any delay. National Coordinators and the Governing Board intensified their work, the number of meetings doubled. EUSAIR proved able to live up to the challenge of digital communication. This resulted in a significant increase in the attendance and active participation of all participating countries at all governance levels. Numerous shorter meetings allowed more thorough coordination between National Coordinators and Thematic Steering Group members and Pillar Coordinators. The capacity and competences of all EUSAIR implementers together with the enabling environment proved to be key for successful EUSAIR implementation.

Embedding

Building on the 2018 Catania Ministerial Declaration, in June 2020 the Governing Board jointly agreed on the Macro-regional priorities (*EUSAIR flagship projects*). The Presidency shared the EUSAIR flagships with all Programming/Managing Authorities and invited them to embed them into national/regional programmes with the support of the “*financial dialogues*”. The monitoring of the embedding process was launched during the March 2021 Governing Board meeting in line with the Council Conclusions⁹. In April 2021, the joint presentation of EUSAIR flagships to all mainstream, transnational and cross-border programmes, as a step towards establishing networks of (managing) authorities of relevant 2021–2027 EU funding programmes, was organised as an initiative aimed at enhancing embedding networking experiences at national level.

EU enlargement policy

Welcoming North Macedonia as a new EUSAIR member country, the Presidency was seen through the lens of general recognition of the MRS contribution to European Enlargement and Neighbourhood Policies. Close cooperation continued within the work of the EUSAIR TRIO Presidency (Serbia, Slovenia, Albania). The SI Presidency initiated a consultation process to assess the relevance of EUSAIR flagships for the Economic and Investment Plan and Green Agenda for the Western Balkans, which could significantly accelerate the implementation of the latter. The process that was tested on the thematic areas of environment and transport connectivity allows for identification of EUSAIR (flagship) to be implemented through IPA III support and could significantly speed up EIP/GA implementation and thus contribute to a new growth model in the Western Balkans. EUSAIR as a functioning platform can contribute to IPA III implementation with relevance, maturity and capacity. The Presidency called all interested actors and countries to continue exploring possibilities in other areas of EUSAIR activities, too.

Cross-MRS Coordination

The Presidency intensively coordinated activities in relation to the embedding process with other actors active in the Adriatic-Ionian region such as EUSDR and EUSALP, and other transnational cooperation programmes to pool all available resources, financial and human, in well-coordinated actions. In September 2020, it hosted the third meeting of chairpersons of the National Coordination Groups (TRIO presidencies of the four Macro-regional Strategies) focusing on the optimisation of the monitoring and evaluation of the embedding process and meaningful governance, including governance support.

Stakeholder involvement

In September 2020, Slovenia hosted, for the fifth time in Izola, the *Mediterranean Coast and Macro-regional Strategies Week 2020*. It attracted more than 1000 participants from the Baltic, Danube, Alpine and Adriatic-Ionian region, who discussed common challenges, best practices and joint actions. The event comprehensively addressed the COVID-19 challenges in the tourism sector, the need for systematic planning of green infrastructure for self-sufficient food production in the EU, EUSAIR smart specialisation strategies for a green and smart Europe, and, with the support of the Interact programme, Macro-regional and EUSAIR contribution to the European Green Deal and Green Agenda for the Western Balkans. We look forward to the 6th Mediterranean Coast and Macro-regional Strategies Week 2021 that will be hosted by North Macedonia and thus a continuation of good practice of intensive stakeholder involvement and local population activation across the EUSAIR region developed in the last five years in Izola, Slovenia.

Annual Forums

Two Annual Forums marked the Slovenian Presidency. Due to the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, the extraordinary 5th Annual Forum was organised by the Serbian Presidency in January 2021. The regular 6th Annual Forum took place in May 2021 under the Slovenian Presidency. The agreed flexibility between the two presidencies maintained a high level of political ownership and allowed for broad exchange between multiple stakeholders on EUSAIR achievements and future challenges.

Youth and civil society engagement

The Presidency initiated, facilitated and financially supported different forms of youth engagement. The Presidency addressed Climate Change Challenges in the educational process, exchanged between generations on how best to exploit EUSAIR for a securing common future and established the functioning EUSAIR network of technological parks that are offering knowledge support to educational institutions and mentors to train young (14–29-year-olds) in entrepreneurial thinking. National competitions (POPRI) for the best entrepreneurial ideas took place in all EUSAIR countries, whereas final competition took place during the Annual Forum that awarded the best ones. EUSAIR Facility Point grasped the opportunity of the Forum being organised virtually to boost EUSAIR's visibility among young people, including through the pre-Forum event *Many generations – one future!* in which the EUSAIR idea is presented to interested students, young researchers, mentors and professors. To increase EUSAIR's visibility within civil society, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Slovenia decided to, for the first time during the EUSAIR Annual Forum, award the *Windmill of Excellence* – an honorary title of the MRS Ambassador to civil society representatives who used their vast experience in developing Macro-regional Strategies to contribute to the common good.

Thematic focus: Green Connectivity

With the establishment of Green Connectivity as the thematic focus of the Slovenian Presidency, it has become a crosscutting issue shared by the Strategy and beyond. The environmental evaluation matrix was recognised as a tool for greening EUSAIR across all four of its thematic steering groups. *The handbook for green infrastructure for spatial planning* enhances cooperation for sustainable solutions among the EUSAIR Pillars, countries and EU regions for the safer future of young generations. Eco-connectivity has been a source of cooperation with the Danube macro-region through the establishment of blue corridors in shared riverine ecosystems. The establishment of blue corridors to the sea in the process of Marine Spatial Planning is a measure to improve the functional connectivity of ecological networks and should contribute to sustainable fisheries and navigation in marine ecoregions and will concretely contribute to the EU Sustainable Blue Economy in marine ecoregions.

ACHIEVEMENTS OF THE SLOVENIAN AII CHAIRMANSHIP

The AII Slovenian Chairmanship organised numerous AII Round Tables:

- Round Table on Inter-University Cooperation in the Adriatic and Ionian Region, organised by the AII Slovenian Chairmanship in cooperation with UNIADRION and the AII Permanent Secretariat on 17 November 2020;
- Round Table on “Societal Challenges: Crisis management and marketing communication during COVID-19” organised by the AII Slovenian Chairmanship in cooperation with the AII Permanent Secretariat and the Fora of Civil Society (Chambers of Commerce, Cities and Universities) on 27 January;
- Round Table on “Preservation of Natural resources, Innovation and Robotics for the development of the economy in the Adriatic-Ionian Region” organised by the AII Slovenian Chairmanship in cooperation with the AII Permanent Secretariat and the Fora of Civil Society (Chambers of Commerce, Cities and Universities) on 27 January;
- Round Table on “The COVID-19 pandemic – imposed catalyst for Women’s Entrepreneurship progress in the Adriatic and Ionian Region?” organised by the AII Slovenian Chairmanship in cooperation with the AII Permanent Secretariat and the Fora of Civil Society (Chambers of Commerce, Cities and Universities) on 29 January;
- Round Table on Equal Opportunities organised by the AII Slovenian Chairmanship in cooperation with the Forum of the Adriatic and Ionian Chambers of Commerce and the AII Permanent Secretariat on 24 March;
- Round Table on “Saline intrusion: a potential risk for coastal aquifer management in a changing climate” organised by the AII Slovenian Chairmanship in cooperation with the AII Permanent Secretariat and the Fora of Civil Society (Chambers of Commerce, Cities and Universities) on 10 May;
- Round Table on “Small ports in the Blue Growth strategy”, organised by the AII Slovenian Chairmanship in cooperation with the AII Permanent Secretariat and the Fora of Civil Society (Chambers of Commerce, Cities and Universities) on 10 May;
- Round Table on “SMEs towards the circular economy”, organised by the AII Slovenian Chairmanship in cooperation with the AII Permanent Secretariat and the Forum of the Adriatic and Ionian Chambers of Commerce on 12 May.

Along with the Round Tables, the Slovenian Presidency organised on 9 December 2020 (online) the second meeting of the Fora of Civil Society (Chambers of Commerce, Cities and Universities) plus the AII Permanent Secretariat with the AII Slovenian Chairmanship, further demonstrating a growing awareness of the role and the contribution that civil society is increasingly bringing – as well as through their involvement in the AII Round Tables – to the EUSAIR Strategy process;

The Chamber of Commerce and Industry of Primorska joined the Forum of the Adriatic and Ionian Chambers of Commerce as an ordinary member, within the framework of the 2020–2021 AII Slovenian Chairmanship;

The second AII Troika plus Secretariat meeting took place on 25 March 2021 (online), as an innovative and constructive mechanism to assure the continuity and the synergy of AII and EUSAIR activities;

The 17th Conference of Speakers of National Parliaments of the AII was organised on 15 April 2021 by the National Assembly of Slovenia, focusing primarily on the issues of the young generation and challenges that it faces in particular during the pandemic of COVID-19. The speakers also adopted a Joint Conference Statement, pointing out their views on future cooperation in the AII region and the role of parliaments as directly elected representatives of the people.

In addition to this, members of the Slovene National Assembly participated as key note speakers at the two above-mentioned events in November and December 2020, thus acknowledging the importance of broad cooperation and recognising the role of civil society in the AII region.

The AII Slovenian Presidency introduced new topics of cooperation such as Equal Opportunities, Women’s Entrepreneurship and Women’s Empowerment;

Within the framework of the AII Slovenian Chairmanship, the second meeting of the AII Ombudspersons was held on 24 August (online) by the AII Permanent Secretariat in cooperation with the Office of the Marche Region Ombudsman and the EUSAIR Facility Point, to discuss the issue of the protection and promotion of the rights of children in the Adriatic-Ionian Region, sharing best practices and instruments to protect children and adolescents in emergency situations. The Declaration of Intent on the Protection and Promotion of Children’s Rights in the framework of the EU Strategy for Adriatic-Ionian Region / Adriatic and Ionian Initiative was approved as a concrete outcome of the meeting;

In Cooperation with EUSAIR Facility Point, under the Slovenian Presidency, the AII Permanent Secretariat organised the webinar “Fundamental Rights and EU Enlargement: prospects in the Adriatic-Ionian Area” on 25 August (online), which explored ways to advance the protection of fundamental rights while at the same time moving forward with the enlargement process in the Western Balkans;

The initiative “Active Young Citizens for Sustainable Development in CEI and AII areas”, co-organised by the CEI and AII Secretariats, designed to stimulate the engagement of young people in the Central European Initiative and the Adriatic and Ionian Initiative regions in order to raise awareness on the UN Agenda 2030 and its 17 Sustainable Development Goals.

We have left a trace

With the successful organisation of the 6th Forum, Izola has shown that municipalities are important factors of development and a partner of the state in joint planning and execution of European projects and consultations. We are especially proud that we have left a trace with the **Izola Declaration** and have restored the signs **Protect the Sea**, which will be a reminder of the Forum. The coasts of the shared sea can only remain clean with the cooperation of all countries in sustainable management.

Iztok Škerlič,

Public Institute for the Promotion of Entrepreneurship and Development Projects of the Municipality of Izola, EUSAIR Facility Point Slovene Project Partner



The **Final Report** outlines the activities and results of the Slovene Presidency of EUSAIR during the period from 1 June 2020 to 31 May 2021. It was commissioned by Public Institute for the Promotion of Entrepreneurship and Development Projects of the Municipality of Izola, EUSAIR Facility Point Slovene Project Partner, in cooperation with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Government Office for Development and European Cohesion Policy and the Ministry of the Environment and Spatial Planning of the Republic of Slovenia.

Produced by Gigodesign 2. Edited by Stojan Pelko. Interviews conducted by Petra Svetina. English translation and proof-reading by Martin Cregeen. Photography by Tomaž Primožič. AD & design Krista Likar. Printed by Emigma d. o. o.

Publisher: Javni zavod za spodbujanje podjetništva in razvojne projekte Občine Izola, Sončno nabrežje 8, 6310 Izola. Number of copies: 200. Izola, June 2021

CIP - Kataložni zapis o publikaciji
Narodna in univerzitetna knjižnica, Ljubljana

316.42(497+4-191.2)
061.1EU

EUSAIR : Slovene Presidency 20-21 : Final Report / [editorial board Olga Abram ... [et al.] ; interviews conducted by Petra Svetina ; English translation by Martin Cregeen ; photography by Tomaž Primožič]. - Izola : Javni zavod za spodbujanje podjetništva in razvojne projekte Občine Izola, 2021

ISBN 978-961-95412-0-3
COBISS.SI-ID 66202883

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Co-funded by
the European Union



This Report has been produced with the financial assistance of the European Union.

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