



REPUBLIC OF CROATIA  
Ministry of Foreign  
and European Affairs



## IX Adriatic and Ionian Council / EUSAIR Ministerial Meeting

### Šibenik Declaration

15 May 2024

**We, the Representatives of the Governments of Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Greece, Italy, Montenegro, North Macedonia, San Marino, Serbia and Slovenia**, meeting in Šibenik, with the participation of the **European Commission**, in the framework of the 9<sup>th</sup> Forum of the European Union Strategy for the Adriatic and Ionian Region (EUSAIR):

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*[Preamble]*

**GUIDED** by the Ancona Declaration of 20 May 2000 and its basic principles, and **RECALLING** the principles expressed by the consecutive Adriatic and Ionian Council (AIC) declarations and by the joint AIC/EUSAIR Ministerial Declarations;

**RECALLING** the Conclusions of the EU General Affairs Council of 29 September 2014 and those of the European Council of 23-24 October 2014 which endorsed the EUSAIR, on the basis of the Commission's Communication of 17 June 2014 and subsequent addendum (COM(2020) 132) adopted by the Commission on 2 April 2020, including North Macedonia in the EUSAIR, and the addendum (COM(2022) 44) adopted by the Commission on 14 February 2022, including San Marino in the EUSAIR;

**ACKNOWLEDGING** that the long-term experience of cooperation among Adriatic Ionian Initiative (AII) Governments and the cooperation within the EU Strategy for the Adriatic and Ionian region (EUSAIR) is contributing to the stability and security of the area;

**HIGHLIGHTING** the importance of the 9<sup>th</sup> Cohesion Report which underlines the role of the Cohesion Policy in supporting growth and recovery across Europe's regions, all the while delivering on the green and digital transition and helping regions adjust to ongoing demographic, industrial, and geopolitical challenges;

**RECALLING** the Thessaloniki Agenda and the Sofia, Zagreb, Brdo, Tirana and Brussels Declarations in which the EU reconfirmed its full and unequivocal commitment to the European Union membership perspective of the Western Balkans and also the need for Western Balkans partners' sustained and irreversible reform achievements, underpinned by EU values and principles;

**COMMITTING** ourselves to stand together in the face of complex threats and challenges to security in Europe and in the Mediterranean area, and to uphold and safeguard democratic values and the rule-based international order;

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*[Ukraine-Russia]*

**REITERATE** in the strongest terms our condemnation of the Russian Federation's illegal and unprovoked aggression against Ukraine;

**CONFIRM** our resolute support for Ukraine's sovereignty and territorial integrity;

**CONTINUE with** strong political and practical support to Ukraine and its citizens, with the clear vision for Ukraine's future;

*[Gaza Strip]*

**REITERATE** in the strongest terms our condemnation of the attacks by Hamas and other terrorist groups against Israel on 7 October 2023;

**EXPRESS GRAVE CONCERN** about the catastrophic humanitarian situation in the Gaza Strip and the unprecedented loss of human lives;

**CALL FOR** the immediate and unconditional release of all hostages, an immediate humanitarian pause leading to a sustainable ceasefire, and the provision of full, rapid, safe and unhindered access to humanitarian aid; All parties must respect international law, including international humanitarian law and international human rights law;

**REITERATE** our strong commitment to a lasting and sustainable peace based on the two-state solution;

*[Enlargement]*

**ACKNOWLEDGE** the progress made by the AII/EUSAIR participating countries, candidates to EU membership, and **ENCOURAGE** them to remain focused on reforms aimed at demonstrating their adherence to European values, standards and principles;

**WELCOME**, in particular, the decision of the European Council of 21 March 2024 to open accession negotiations with Bosnia and Herzegovina;

**CALL FOR** a significant acceleration of the accession process overall, based upon credible reforms and fair conditionality, and **WELCOME** the enhancement of "EU Enlargement" as a horizontal priority in the revised EUSAIR Action Plan, **RECOGNISING** that the cooperation in the framework of the AII/EUSAIR further facilitates their integration paths;

*[Regional Cooperation]*

**REITERATE** our strong commitment towards activities carried out at regional, national, cross-border, macro-regional, transnational and interregional levels, related to the development and prosperity of the Adriatic-Ionian region;

**CALL** upon European institutions and the EUSAIR participating countries and stakeholders to strengthen their commitment to the implementation of successful macro-regional projects with necessary political support, guaranteed funding and recognized added value;

*[EUSAIR]*

**ACKNOWLEDGE** with great appreciation the finalisation of the EUSAIR revision process, which will rejuvenate and strengthen the Strategy and make it more relevant and up-to-date, more operational, ambitious and more capable of effectively addressing future challenges

**ACKNOWLEDGE**, equally, the addition of a new, fifth Pillar of cooperation to the EUSAIR portfolio, which will align the Adriatic-Ionian Region priorities with the EU strategies and policies for improving social cohesion, strengthening further the three dimensions of cohesion policy;

**RECOGNISE** the dedication and substantive work done towards successful EUSAIR revision by all key implementers, most notably the Thematic Steering Groups, Pillar Coordinators and National Coordinators, supported diligently by the Facility Point and in close collaboration with the European Commission;

**EMPHASISE** that for the revised EUSAIR Action Plan to fully succeed in unleashing economic prosperity and EU enlargement progress in the Western Balkans it is important to continue investing in institution building, governance reform and civil society engagement;

**EMPHASISE** the need for coordinated actions in the Adriatic and Ionian Region, in close cooperation with EUSAIR implementers and the European Commission, aimed at more efficient identification and implementation of projects focusing on economic and social development in the macroregion;

**WELCOME**, in particular, the crucial updates to the EUSAIR Action Plan in terms of the revision of existing and addition of new topics and actions in all Pillars, as well as the incorporation of new horizontal and cross-cutting topics, while setting indicators and targets that will contribute to a smoother monitoring of the Strategy;

**WELCOME**, furthermore, the work on the preparation of the new EUSAIR Governance Architecture Paper, outlining the roles and responsibilities of key EUSAIR Governance bodies, enabling the stakeholders and implementers to better understand and get involved in the Strategy, and **CALL** for its swift finalisation and endorsement;

**REAFFIRM** the need to enhance the Strategy's multilevel dimension, consolidating the relationship between civil society, local, regional, national and EU Institutions;

**COMMEND** the substantive work done towards the establishment of the EUSAIR Youth Council, **WELCOME** the approval of EUSAIR Youth Council Concept Paper and the opening of the procedure to select young participants to the EUSAIR Youth Council, **LOOK FORWARD** to the imminent establishment of the EUSAIR Youth Council and **CALL FOR** swift finalisation of the process, in order to formally establish the EUSAIR Youth Council and to empower Youth within the EUSAIR family and its structures;

**WELCOME** the recent establishment of a new, three-branched EUSAIR governance support structure – the EUSAIR Governance Point, composed of three Interreg ADRION strategic projects – which provides technical and content-related assistance to EUSAIR implementers, thereby further contributing to the vision of a modernised and innovative EUSAIR;

**RECOGNISE** the importance of support from the side of Interreg ADRION to the EUSAIR;

**ACKNOWLEDGE** the significant results achieved by the Interreg ADRION and the efforts of other EU cohesion policy programmes operating in the Adriatic and Ionian region to embed the EUSAIR flagships and priorities, contributing to EUSAIR objectives through their funded projects;

**CALL** upon EUSAIR key implementers to strengthen their commitment towards achieving EUSAIR objectives and actions, by ensuring the necessary political support and follow up of the embedding process, through more effective coordination and synergies between EU-funded programmes;

**REAFFIRM** the need for the long-term establishment of EUSAIR networks of managing authorities of EU cohesion programmes and networks of National IPA Coordinators to better facilitate funding of EUSAIR objectives;

**COMMIT** to further promote the added value of the meetings of the TRIO Presidencies of the EU macro-regional strategies, where the adopted Guidelines for Cooperation provide a possible framework for better exchange of common practices between macro-regional strategies;

**RECOGNISE** the opportunity for EUSAIR to contribute to the discussion on post-2027 EU cohesion policy and **CALL FOR** operational organisation of consultations among EUSAIR implementers and stakeholders as well as active involvement of Governing Board in shaping the common EUSAIR messages on post-2027 cohesion and conveying them at relevant occasions;

*[All political and coordination role]*

**APPRECIATE** the traditional AII connecting role between Governments, regional actors and civil society fora and their networks as a key element for the success of the EUSAIR;

**REAFFIRM** the role of the AII as the “political anchorage” to the EUSAIR and **COMMEND** the Permanent Secretariat for its efforts aimed at maintaining efficient links with the EUSAIR pillars as well as civil society at large;

*[Fora of Civil Society]*

**APPRECIATE** the Permanent Secretariat's efforts aimed at maintaining efficient and constant links with the Adriatic-Ionian "Fora" of Cities, Chambers of Commerce, universities, convinced that - through the AII Fora - civil society can provide added value to the EUSAIR delivering tangible and beneficial results;

**VALUE** the contribution brought forward by the three Fora of the Chambers of Commerce, of the Cities, of the Universities of the Adriatic Ionian Region, and **COMMEND** them for their "Joint Declaration on the preservation and promotion of the Mediterranean diet in the Adriatic and Ionian region", issued in Split on 14 May 2024, and **ENDORSE** it as a tool aimed at fostering a lifestyle profoundly oriented towards health, environmental sustainability and solidly based on common cultural and social roots;

*[Youth and women empowerment]*

**STRESS** the essential role of regional cooperation and people-to-people exchanges, including academic, cultural and sport mobility, and their unique potential to contribute to political stabilisation and to enhance economic opportunities through mutual understanding, greater tolerance and democratic participation, so promoting European values and the cohesion of society;

**APPRECIATE** the AII Permanent Secretariat's proactive approach, aimed at tackling the current challenges through own initiatives, in particular in the field of youth and women empowerment, making good use of AII funds, and **COMMEND** efforts in granting financial support to the realisation of internships, scholarships and high schools projects;

*[Regional organisations]*

**ACKNOWLEDGE** the importance of interaction among the Secretariats of regional organisations in order to further develop synergies and exchange experience, best practices and know-how, **CONGRATULATE** the AII Permanent Secretariat for hosting the 17<sup>th</sup> Coordination Meeting of Regional Organisations held in Ancona on 5 December 2023 and **CONSIDER** the signature of the Letter of Intent between the Black Sea Economic Cooperation Permanent International Secretariat and AII Permanent Secretariat a positive step in this direction;

**WELCOME** the implementation of the Memorandum of Understanding between the Central European Initiative (CEI) Executive Secretariat and the AII Permanent Secretariat, which resulted in three editions of the joint project IMAGINE "Active Young Citizens for Sustainable Development in CEI and AII areas" and **ENCOURAGE** the AII to develop similar initiatives with regional organisations in the future;

**ACKNOWLEDGE** the importance of creating and maintaining synergies with other regional frameworks of cooperation in the Mediterranean Region;

*[Parliaments]*

**CONVINCED** that the role of AII Parliaments is of capital importance as direct representatives of the peoples and that their cooperation will boost the existing excellent neighbourly relations among our peoples, **CALL ON** relevant parties to find effective solutions to revitalise this dossier;

*[Final operative clauses]*

**CONGRATULATE** Croatia on its successful chairmanship over the AII and EUSAIR and on successfully delivering numerous achievements as outlined in the Annexes to this Declaration;

**THANK** Croatia and the City of Šibenik for the excellent organisation and hospitality offered on the occasion of the AIC/EUSAIR ministerial meeting and the 9<sup>th</sup> EUSAIR Forum;

**ENTRUST** the incoming AII/EUSAIR Chairmanship from 1 June 2024 to 31 May 2025 to the Hellenic Republic, inviting it to use all instruments at its disposal with the aim of consolidating cooperation and leading the AII/EUSAIR Region into a period of sustainable growth and prosperity.

## ANNEX I

### Achievements of the Croatian EUSAIR Presidency

During its 2023-2024 EUSAIR Presidency Croatia has organised and chaired the following events and official meetings.

- **Conferences & Strategy-related Events:**

- June 19<sup>th</sup> – 20<sup>th</sup> 2023, EUSAIR/All Presidency Kick-Off Conference, Zagreb
- June 20<sup>th</sup> – 21<sup>st</sup> 2023, EU-Funded Marine Robotics and Applications Workshop (*EMRA*), Šibenik
- June 21<sup>st</sup> 2023, Conference on Sustainable Nautical Tourism, Zagreb
- July 4<sup>th</sup> – 5<sup>th</sup> 2023, Stronger Women for a Stronger Adriatic-Ionian Region Conference, Zagreb
- October 18<sup>th</sup> 2023, EUSAIR Energy Round Table on Hydrogen, Geothermal Energy and New Technologies in Decarbonisation, Zagreb
- October 25<sup>th</sup> 2023, Round Table on Development of Green Tourism Products and Balanced Tourism Development, Zagreb
- November 15<sup>th</sup> – 16<sup>th</sup> 2023, The Adriatic-Ionian Region is You(th)! Conference, Split
- November 22<sup>nd</sup> 2023, Conference on the Protection of Waters and Seas from Plastics and Micro-Plastics Pollution, Zagreb
- December 15<sup>th</sup> 2023, Skills for the Future Powered by ESF+ Conference, Zagreb
- February 21<sup>st</sup> 2024, EUSAIR Governance Support Projects Kick-off Conference, Zagreb
- April 23<sup>rd</sup> 2024, Conference on the implementation of EU 2030 Biodiversity Strategy in the Adriatic Sea through joint solutions for nature and fisheries, Zadar
- April 25<sup>th</sup> 2024, TEN-T Western Balkans - Eastern Mediterranean Corridor Conference, Zagreb
- May 8<sup>th</sup> 2024, UniAdriatic Rectors' Conference on Blue Economy, Split
- May 14<sup>th</sup> 2024, Interreg: Developing a Vision for the Future conference (CoR / Interact / EUSAIR joint event), Šibenik
- May 15<sup>th</sup> – 16<sup>th</sup> 2024, 9<sup>th</sup> EUSAIR Forum, Šibenik

- **Official meetings of the Strategy's bodies**

- 20<sup>th</sup> Extraordinary Governing Board Meeting, June 19<sup>th</sup> 2023, Zagreb
- 21<sup>st</sup> Governing Board Meeting, October 11<sup>th</sup> – 12<sup>th</sup> 2024, Dubrovnik
- 22<sup>nd</sup> Governing Board Meeting, February 21<sup>st</sup> – 22<sup>nd</sup> 2024, Zagreb
  
- 4<sup>th</sup> Revision Working Group Meeting, July 11<sup>th</sup> 2023, Zagreb & online
- 5<sup>th</sup> Revision Working Group Meeting, October 2<sup>nd</sup> 2023, Online
- 6<sup>th</sup> Revision Working Group Meeting, October 26<sup>th</sup> – 27<sup>th</sup> & 30<sup>th</sup> 2023, Online
- 7<sup>th</sup> Revision Working Group Meeting, November 13<sup>th</sup> 2023, Online
- 8<sup>th</sup> Revision Working Group Meeting, December 1<sup>st</sup> & 4<sup>th</sup> – 5<sup>th</sup> 2023, Online
- 9<sup>th</sup> Revision Working Group Meeting, December 21<sup>st</sup> 2023, Online

- 4<sup>th</sup> Youth Task Force Meeting, July 7<sup>th</sup> 2023, Online
- 5<sup>th</sup> Youth Task Force Meeting, November 15<sup>th</sup> 2023, Split & online
- 6<sup>th</sup> Youth Task Force Meeting, December 20<sup>th</sup> 2023, Online
- 7<sup>th</sup> Youth Task Force Meeting, March 26<sup>th</sup> 2024, Online
- 8<sup>th</sup> Youth Task Force Meeting, May 29<sup>th</sup> 2024, Online



## **ANNEX II**

### **Achievements of Croatian All Chairmanship**

- ❖ The All Croatian Chairmanship organised the following Round Tables and Conferences:
  - The EUSAIR/All Presidency Kick-Off Conference on 19-20 June 2023 in Zagreb (Croatia);
  - The international conference on "Strong Women for a Stronger Adriatic-Ionian Region", organised by the Ministry of Foreign and European Affairs in cooperation with the All-PS on 4-5 July 2023 in Zagreb (Croatia).
  - The Round Table on Development of Green Tourism Products and Balanced Tourism Development, organised in cooperation with the Thematic Steering Group (TSG) 4 on Sustainable Tourism and the Ministry of Tourism and Sport of the Republic of Croatia, on 25 October 2023 in Zagreb (Croatia).
  - The Conference named "THE ADRIATIC-IONIAN REGION IS YOU(TH)!" organised by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Croatia with the support of the All Permanent Secretariat and the Split University on 15-16 November 2023 in Split (Croatia).
  - The Round Table on "Quo vadis UniAdrion? The direction of inter-university cooperation", organised by UniAdrion in cooperation with the Permanent Secretariat and the Split University on 15 November 2023 in Split (Croatia);
  - The All Round Table on "Preservation and Promotion of the Mediterranean Diet in the Adriatic and Ionian Region (Well-being, Sustainability and Culture)" organised by the Forum of the Adriatic Ionian Chambers of Commerce and the Forum of the Adriatic Ionian Cities in cooperation with the All Permanent Secretariat on 15 May 2024, within the framework of the EUSAIR Annual Forum in Šibenik.
  - The All Round Table on "Addressing Transportation Challenges in the Adriatic-Ionian Region" organised by the Forum of the Adriatic Ionian Chambers of Commerce and the Forum of the Adriatic Ionian Cities in cooperation with the All Permanent Secretariat on 15 May 2024 in Šibenik;
  - The Conference on "Civic Engagement of Students: Collaborating with Universities for Global Impact - The Best Practice of ESN-AIR" organised by UniAdrion in cooperation with the All Permanent Secretariat on 15 May 2024 in Šibenik;
  
- ❖ The All Trio plus Secretariat meeting took place on 10 October 2023 in Dubrovnik (Croatia), along with the EUSAIR Trio Presidency meeting, as an innovative and constructive mechanism to assure the continuity and synergy of the All and EUSAIR activities;
  
- ❖ The All Permanent Secretariat organised, under the Croatian chairmanship, and within the framework of the 18<sup>th</sup> ed. of the Adriatic Mediterranean Festival, 30 August – 3 September 2023 in Ancona, a public meeting which awarded the Adriatic Mediterranean Prize to Mr. Joze Thomas, President of the Forum of the Adriatic Ionian Chambers of Commerce, in

acknowledgement of the work done with dedication and passion for the benefits of citizens and companies of the Adriatic and Ionian region.

- ❖ The All Permanent Secretariat has financed, through the funds received by the Italian Ministry for Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation, several projects and initiatives designed to empower youth and younger generations:
  - The 10 two-year scholarships granted to students coming from the Adriatic-Ionian region and the Western Balkans for the enrolment in one of the five master's degree courses taught in English at the Marche Polytechnic University for the academic year 2022/23 and 2023/24, financed by the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation.
  - The All Internships Programme, named Western Balkanship, organised by the Permanent Secretariat in cooperation with the Forum of the Adriatic and Ionian Chambers of Commerce and UniAdrion, financed by the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation, covering 50 scholarships. The programme intends to involve students from universities in the Adriatic-Ionian region and companies, promoting student mobility in the Adriatic-Ionian Region and supporting the circulation of ideas and skills, involving universities and companies.
  
- ❖ The All Permanent Secretariat organised the 17<sup>th</sup> Coordination Meeting of Regional Organisations held in Ancona, Italy, on 5 December 2023, hosted by the Adriatic and Ionian Initiative Permanent Secretariat. The event gave participants the chance to exchange views and information on the activities carried out by each of these organizations as well as to discuss possibilities and modalities to further enhance synergies, interaction and coordination in areas of common interest. A Letter of Intent for further strengthening the cooperation between the Black Sea Economic Cooperation Permanent Secretariat and the All Permanent Secretariat was signed.

## ANNEX III



### JOINT DECLARATION OF THE 3 FORA

on the Preservation and Promotion of the Mediterranean Diet in the Adriatic and Ionian Region:

Well-being, Sustainability and Culture

***The Fora of Civil Society (Forum of the Adriatic and Ionian Chambers of Commerce, the Forum of the Adriatic and Ionian Cities and UniAdrion) and their member Institutions agree and stipulate the following:***

***The undersigned Associations and their member Institutions agree and stipulate the following:***

To undertake to jointly promote and safeguard the richness of the Mediterranean Diet through an integrated and collaborative approach. This pledge translates into a concrete action for the *promotion of a sustainable food model that respects the environment and health and aims to:*

- I. Acknowledge and accept the values of the Mediterranean Diet in accordance with the UNESCO Intangible Cultural Heritage recognition, as a tool for development, stability and solidarity for the peoples of the Mediterranean area.
- II. Acknowledge the Mediterranean Diet as a food model that is closely tied to the culture and traditions of Adriatic and Ionian communities and to actively preserve and promote the practices, rituals and symbols representing this cultural heritage, while also fostering their transmission through the generations and their respect in the Region's civil society. This includes the promotion of cultural events, food festivals and educational programmes, training and capacity building actions that celebrate the richness and diversity of the Mediterranean Diet.
- III. Acknowledge the private sector's key role in promoting and supporting the Mediterranean Diet, actively work with producers, retailers, caterers and other stakeholders to ensure the quality and authenticity of Mediterranean products and to promote them in the market. This includes the creation of partnerships with private actors, the promotion of quality standards for Mediterranean products and working with the tourism sector to promote the Mediterranean Diet as a tourist attraction, also embracing "silver tourism", i.e. tourist offers for over-65 people to promote people's wellbeing based on a balanced and healthy diet.

- IV. Acknowledge the need for a cooperative and multilateral approach to effectively promote the Mediterranean Diet, work together through the Fora networks to exchange knowledge, share best practices and promote joint initiatives that promote and disseminate the principles of the Mediterranean Diet. This includes the organisation of joint conferences and seminars and the promotion of European and cross-border cooperation projects.
- V. Acknowledge the health benefits associated with the Mediterranean Diet, promote its adoption among the people of the Adriatic-Ionian community, including young and over-65 people. Promote nutrition education by encouraging healthy eating habits and supporting scientific research to learn more about the links between nutrition and health. This includes the promotion of health awareness campaigns, studies, collaboration with universities and research centres and the publication of scientific reports, collaboration with medical institutions to integrate the Mediterranean Diet into public health policies.
- VI. Aware of the importance of biodiversity and environmental preservation, support food production and consumption systems that respect the natural balances of the Mediterranean region. Promote sustainable agriculture, the consumption of local and seasonal products, and the reduction of production processes' environmental impact. This includes encouraging sustainable farming practices, promoting farmers' markets for local products and raising awareness about responsible consumption.