



Republic of Serbia
Ministry of Foreign Affairs



Chairmanship of Serbia



EU Strategy
for the Adriatic
and Ionian Region
EUSAIR

Adriatic and Ionian Council/EUSAIR Ministerial Meeting

BELGRADE Declaration

18 June 2020

We, the Representatives of the Governments of Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Greece, Italy, Montenegro, North Macedonia¹, San Marino², Serbia and Slovenia meeting via video conference initiated from Belgrade (Serbia), with the participation of the **European Commission**, in the framework of the Adriatic and Ionian Council/EUSAIR Ministerial Meeting (the 5th Forum of EUSAIR being postponed due to COVID-19 pandemic):

GUIDED by the Ancona Declaration of 20 May 2000 and its basic principles, as well as by the principles expressed by the consecutive Adriatic and Ionian Council (AIC) declarations and by the joint AIC/EUSAIR Ministerial Declarations, conclusions of the EU Institutions, Commission communication;

ACKNOWLEDGING that the experience of 20 years of cooperation among AII Governments benefitted the EU Strategy for the Adriatic and Ionian Region (EUSAIR);

CELEBRATING the 20th Anniversary since the creation of the Adriatic and Ionian Initiative;

RECALLING the Conclusions of the EU General Affairs Council (GAC) of 29 September 2014 and those of the European Council of 23-24 October 2014 which endorsed the EUSAIR, on the basis of the Commission's Communication of 17 June 2014 and the Addendum to the EUSAIR Communication {COM(2020) 132 final} adopted by the Commission on 2 April 2020, including North Macedonia in the EUSAIR;

¹ AII Participating Country, has become the ninth participating country of the EU Strategy for the Adriatic and Ionian Region (EUSAIR) on 2 April 2020.

² AII Participating Country.

APPRECIATING the outstanding contribution brought by EUSAIR and AII in strengthening the regional cooperation dimension in policy areas of major importance for the future of the whole Region and their positive impact on the process of integrating candidate and potential candidate countries in the EU;

RECALLING the Ministerial Declarations adopted in Catania on 24 May 2018 and in Budva on 8 May 2019, which paved the way for an effective and mutually beneficial relationship between the EUSAIR and the ESIF and IPA programmes for the 2021 – 2027 programming period;

RECALLING the Communication from the European Commission {COM(2020) 37 final} of 29 January 2020 on the Commission Work Programme 2020 (“A Union that strives for more”), with its six headline ambitions, and the Communication from the European Commission {COM(2020) 57 final} of 5 February 2020 (“Enhancing the accession process - A credible EU perspective for the Western Balkans”), which underlines European Union’s commitment to deepening its partnership with the Western Balkans by enhancing the accession process;

ACKNOWLEDGING that the COVID-19 pandemic poses an unprecedented threat also to all AII participating countries and the AII region as a whole;

RECOGNISING, with deep sadness that there has been a significant number of lives lost across the AI region, highlighting the extreme vulnerability, in particular, of the elderly people;

TAKING INTO CONSIDERATION that the main issue for the AII participating countries, at this moment, remains how to minimise the impact of COVID-19 on healthcare systems and citizens’ health while restoring economic and social activities, close cooperation on this issue and openness to follow the “Joint European Roadmap” towards lifting COVID-19 containment measures and the proposed recovery plan for Europe as an instrument helping all of us to combat COVID-19, is required;

ENCOURAGING all actors in the Adriatic and Ionian region to cooperate and coordinate COVID-19 recovery measures to stimulate Green Recovery (*in line with European Green Deal and Green Agenda for Western Balkan*), putting EUSAIR governance structure in the centre.

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1. **WELCOME** the fact that on 2 April 2020 North Macedonia has become the ninth participating country of the EUSAIR; **COMMIT** to fully implement the EUSAIR Action Plan and better take advantage of North Macedonia’s full capacity as standing member of the Strategy;
2. **ACKNOWLEDGE** that with the inclusion of North Macedonia, the EUSAIR is set up as the privileged macro-regional strategy for the European perspective of the Western Balkans and that cooperation with Member States allows candidate

countries and potential candidates to gradually access and benefit from EU policies, initiatives and instruments;

3. **CALL** on EUSAIR key implementers to look for ways to link EUSAIR activities more effectively to the enlargement process of the Western Balkans. In this framework, the new enlargement methodology, aiming at a more credible, dynamic, predictable and political EU accession process should be taken into account in line with the EU objective to build a “Stronger Europe in the World”;
4. **WELCOME** the decision of the European Council of 27 March to open accession negotiations with Albania and North Macedonia, as well as the adoption of the Zagreb Declaration on the occasion of the EU Western Balkans Summit held on 6 May in Zagreb under the Croatian Presidency of the Council of the EU, as crucial milestones to respond jointly to the COVID-19 crisis, reaffirming the EU’s unequivocal support for the European perspective of the Western Balkans as well as the Western Balkans’ continued commitment to the European perspective as their firm strategic choice, stressing the importance of good neighbourly relations and regional cooperation;
5. **RECOGNIZE** the serious threats that climate change and environmental degradation pose to the world, to Europe and more specifically to the Adriatic and Ionian region and its seas. **WELCOME** the “European Green Deal” adopted by the Commission {COM(2019) 640 final} as a new growth strategy aiming to transform Europe into a modern, resource-efficient and competitive economy and **EXPRESS** the need to pursue EU climate ambitions throughout all EUSAIR Pillars, also promoting a Green Agenda for the Western Balkans. **COMMIT** to tackling climate and environmental-related challenges as this generation’s defining task, in so doing turning an imminent risk into a unique opportunity;
6. **ACKNOWLEDGE** that the “Recovery Plan for Europe” and the forthcoming “Economic and Investment Plan for recovery”³ for the Western Balkans are powerful instruments to counter the negative socio-economic consequences of the crisis and that the twin green and digital transitions will be central elements to set up the basis for a more sustainable and inclusive growth in the Adriatic and Ionian Region;
7. **COMMIT** to jointly respond to the socio-economic consequences of the COVID-19 crisis by facilitating the use of the unprecedented amount of funds mobilised to improve connectivity in terms of transport and energy links, sustainability of blue economy sectors as well as tourism and culture, which are among the most severely affected sectors;
8. **RECOGNISE** the hard work carried out by the National Coordinators (NCs), the Thematic Steering Groups (TSG) members and experts, as well the Commission’s role as strategic adviser, on the Post-2020 programming process and the Embedding Process, and **COMMEND** the adoption of the list of jointly agreed priorities and flagships at the 12th Extraordinary EUSAIR GB on 10 June.

³ Described in the European Commission Communication on 'Support to the Western Balkans in tackling COVID-19 and post pandemic recovery' COM(2020) 315 final.

ENCOURAGE the NCs to take over coordinated action to see flagships and projects implemented in the Operational Programmes and IPA III programming documents, ultimately monitored within the frameworks adopted by the EUSAIR Governing Board;

9. **REQUEST** the Slovenian EUSAIR Chairmanship in Office to inform via NCs the respective institutions of all EUSAIR participating countries responsible for programming and all European Commission General Directorates on agreed EUSAIR macroregional priorities to be embedded in Operational Programmes and IPA programming documents for 2021-2027 to the maximum possible extent, and to inspire European Commission directly-managed programmes;
10. **CALL** on NCs to follow closely the inclusion of as many selected flagships as possible in ESIF Operational Programmes and IPA programming documents and their implementation, in the post-2020 programming period, through joint or coordinated projects and to foster cooperation of funding programmes, i.e. through facilitating the establishment of networks of ESI Managing Authorities and national IPA coordinators (NIPAC);
11. **COMMEND** the EUSAIR Facility Point for organising a meeting among EUSAIR key implementers and ESIF/IPA Programme Authorities (Portorož, September 2019), as a first positive step in this direction. Events of such kind provide added value to constant dialogue for effectively addressing common challenges in the Adriatic and Ionian region;
12. **COMMEND** the Serbian EUSAIR Chairmanship in Office for conveying the mutually agreed letter expressing our common willingness to include jointly agreed EUSAIR priorities in the future IPA III Strategic Framework, so that we could effectively utilise a portion of IPA III funds for cooperation actions and projects defined in the framework of EUSAIR;
13. **RECALL** that the IPA III programming framework allows, in principle, embedding with EUSAIR, especially for its Window 3 “Green agenda and connectivity”, Window 4 “Competitiveness and Inclusive Growth” and Window 5 “Territorial and cross-border cooperation”;
14. **ENCOURAGE** EUSAIR participating countries as well as the European Commission to jointly identify possible financial resources (EU funds, National budgets, IFIs, other donors, etc.) to develop and fund the identified and agreed flagship projects;
15. **CALL ON ALL** concerned authorities to align strongly all post-2020 Interreg cooperation programmes of the AI macroregion with EUSAIR objectives. **SUPPORT** the participation of the EUSAIR Governing Board Representatives to the Task Forces for post 2020 of all Interreg cooperation programmes of the macroregion;
16. **RECALL** the need to enhance coordination between ADRION and the other Interreg cooperation programmes of the macroregion and cooperation with all

other Transnational Interreg cooperation programmes in the region in the post-2020 programming period, while contributing to EUSAIR objectives;

17. **RECOGNISE** the relevance of Interreg terrestrial and maritime Cross-Border and IPA Cross-Border Cooperation programmes in the Adriatic and Ionian region to contribute to EUSAIR objectives and **CALL** on key implementers to promote synergies with them and to facilitate cooperation and/or joint operations in the post-2020 programming period;
18. **APPRECIATE** the contribution brought by the EUSAIR Facility Point Stakeholder Platform to enhance the continuing dialogue during this period of “stay-at-home” policies and invite the Facility Point Stakeholder Platform to include EUSAIR visual identity.

[Adriatic and Ionian Initiative]

19. **EXPRESS** continuous appreciation for the vitality of the intergovernmental framework represented by the Adriatic and Ionian Initiative and its power of attraction of new participating countries;
20. **CONSIDER** the AII traditional connecting role between governments, regional actors and civil society FORA and networks to be an essential factor in the implementation phase of the macro-regional mechanisms, and **COMMIT** to further raise awareness and promote participation to EUSAIR activities among civil society organisations and citizens in individual countries;
21. **RECOGNISE** the important contribution provided by the Adriatic and Ionian Initiative and the EUSAIR to the progressive strengthening of the regional cooperation dimension and their remarkable role in fostering the cooperation among Adriatic and Ionian participating countries in sectors of pivotal importance for the future of the Region;
22. **ACKNOWLEDGE** the importance of contacts among the secretariats of regional organisations in order to further develop synergies, exchange experiences, best practices and know-how. The perfect example for such cooperation is the signing of the Memorandum of Understanding between the CEI Executive Secretariat and the Adriatic and Ionian Initiative (AII) Permanent Secretariat in the framework of the meeting of the AI Council under the Montenegrin Chairmanship (Budva, 8 May 2019) and the most recent Annual Coordination Meeting in Barcelona (13 November 2019);
23. **CONFIRM** the role of the AII as the “political anchorage” to the EUSAIR and **POSITIVELY ASSESS** its efforts in the field of AII Round Tables, which now systematically cooperate with TSGs, providing them with proposals and recommendations originating from civil society, therefore effectively implementing the principle of subsidiarity; In this regard, closer exchanges among AII Round Tables and the TSGs is encouraged in the frame of identifying priorities for funding, thus bringing added value to the embedding process;

24. **ENCOURAGE** future Chairmanships in Office to continue with organising AII Troika Plus meetings, as well as the EUSAIR Trio Presidency meetings, as an innovative and constructive mechanism to assure the continuity and the synergy of the AII and EUSAIR activities.

[Stakeholders participation]

25. **COMMEND** the AII Permanent Secretariat for granting coordination among participating countries in the framework of the AII activities and for its efforts aimed at maintaining efficient links with the Adriatic and Ionian Fora of civil society organisations, convinced that civil society can provide added value to the EUSAIR delivering tangible and beneficial results;
26. **TAKE NOTE** with satisfaction that the Serbian Chamber of Commerce joined the Forum of the Adriatic and Ionian Chambers of Commerce as an ordinary member, within the framework of the 2019-2020 AII Serbian Chairmanship;
27. **COMMEND** the Serbian Chairmanship for calling the first ever meeting of the Fora of Civil Society (Chambers of Commerce, Cities and Universities) plus the AII Permanent Secretariat with the AII Serbian Chairmanship (Belgrade, 4 September 2019) and **EMPHASISE** that these meetings further demonstrated a growing awareness of the role and the contribution that the Civil Society is increasingly bringing – also through their involvement in the AII Round Tables – to the EUSAIR Strategy process;
28. **SUPPORT** the intensification of cooperation among young people in the region, such as the one recognised as a “driving force of society” – the Youth Connectivity;
29. **APPRECIATE**, along with the numerous AII Round Tables organised during the Serbian Chairmanship, the *ad hoc* Ministerial Round Table on Labour Emigration chaired by Serbia’s Minister of Labour, Employment, Veteran and Social Affairs and the Minister without portfolio responsible for demography and population policy, and **NOTE WITH SATISFACTION** that this was for the first time that an AII Round Table was organised at the Ministerial level;
30. **ENCOURAGE** the AII Troika to organise together a “Youth Orchestra” event during the days of the next Adriatic and Ionian Council, which would shed light on the value of the common cultural and artistic heritage of the Region and further highlight the importance of youth contribution in the framework of the Adriatic and Ionian Initiative;
31. **REGRET** that, due to COVID-19 pandemic in the AI Region, it was impossible to organise the XVII Conference of the Presidents/Speakers of Parliaments of the AII during the Serbian Chairmanship as well as other meetings envisaged by the 2020 part of the Calendar of activities during the Serbian Chairmanship. **LOOK FORWARD**, in particular, to the next conference of the Presidents/Speakers of Parliaments, to be held under Slovenian Chairmanship, convinced that it will confirm the interest of parliaments in the AII/EUSAIR parliamentary dimension;

32. **TAKE NOTE** of the work done to finalise the Annual Report of activities of the AII Permanent Secretariat as well as of the work to have the TSGs Annual Reports and Annual Comprehensive Report of the activities of the 4 EUSAIR Thematic Steering Groups;
33. **COMMEND** the Government of Serbia for the efforts made during the period of its Chairmanship, for the excellent organisation of a very busy and productive Calendar of events and for its valuable contribution to the Adriatic and Ionian Initiative and the EUSAIR throughout the year of its Chairmanship;
34. **THANK** the Serbian Chairmanship in Office and the Serbian Ministry for Foreign Affairs in particular for the initiative to organize the AII/EUSAIR Ministerial meeting on 27 May via videoconference;
35. **REGRET** that the city of Belgrade, as the first capital city in the AI Region to join the Forum of the Adriatic and Ionian Cities and Towns in 2019, could not extend its famed hospitality on the occasion of the AIC/EUSAIR Ministerial meeting, the 5th EUSAIR Forum and the 3rd Annual Conference of the Forum of the Adriatic and Ionian Chambers of Commerce, Cities and Universities, and **WELCOME** the initiative of Serbia to host the 5th EUSAIR Forum in Belgrade before the end of 2020 as an occasion for EUSAIR stakeholders to meet in a wider cross-sectoral format;
36. **ENTRUST** the incoming AII/EUSAIR Chairmanship in Office from 1 June 2020 to 31 May 2021 to the Republic of Slovenia inviting it to use all instruments at its disposal with the aim of consolidating cooperation and leading all countries of the Region into a period of sustainable growth and prosperity.

ANNEX I

The Chairmanship of the Republic of Serbia organised activities in accordance with the Tentative Calendar of activities and Priorities:

- **MOSAICS HERITAGE IN THE AI REGION** - Expert level meeting of representatives of the Ministries of Culture in the AI region (Belgrade and Zaječar – Felix Romouliana, 30/09-3/10-2019)
- **SEE MOSAIC** – Meeting of Conservation Experts (Zaječar – Felix Romouliana, 01-04/10/2019) with the support of the Serbian Ministry of Culture and Information and the Central Institute for Conservation
- **Meeting of National Coordinators** (Belgrade, 21/10/2019)
- **Technical meeting of EUSAIR Pillar Coordinators** (Belgrade, 21/10/2019)
- **AII Committee of Senior Officials** (Belgrade, 21/10/2019)
- **10th EUSAIR Governing Board** (Belgrade, 21-22/10/2019)
- **2nd Trio Presidency** (Belgrade, 22/10/2019)
- **4 meetings of the Thematic Steering Groups** (November 2019)
- **AII Round Table on Energy Inter - Connections** (Belgrade, 20/11/2019)
- **AII Round Table on Inter-University Cooperation** (Belgrade 20/11/2019)
- **AII Round Table on "Labour emigration"** (Belgrade, 21/11/2019)
- **AII Round Table on Environmental Protection** (Belgrade, 17/12/2019)
- **Meeting of EUSAIR National Coordinators** (Brussels, 18/2/2020)
- **Technical meeting of EUSAIR Pillar Coordinators** (Brussels, 18/02/2020)
- **AII Committee of Senior Officials** (Brussels, 18/02/2020)
- **11th EUSAIR Governing Board** (Brussels, 18-19/02/2020)

WE NOTE WITH REGRET that, due to COVID-19 pandemic in the AII region, it was impossible to organise all the activities envisaged by the Calendar of the activities of the Chairmanship of the Republic of Serbia.

ANNEX II



**SERBIA
MINISTRY OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS**



**ADRIATIC AND IONIAN
INITIATIVE
CHAIRMANSHIP OF SERBIA
JUNE 2019-MAY 2020**

ADRIATIC AND IONIAN COUNCIL / EUSAIR Ministerial Meeting

27 May 2020

The Ministers of Foreign Affairs of the Adriatic Ionian Initiative, gathered in Belgrade (via Videoconference) on May 27th 2020,

referring to the provisions of the Ancona Declaration of the Adriatic and Ionian Initiative,

Decide

to Confirm Amb. Giovanni Castellaneta as the Secretary General of the Adriatic and Ionian Initiative Permanent Secretariat in Ancona for a further three years mandate.