



FORUM OF THE CHAMBERS OF COMMERCE OF THE ADRIATIC AND IONIAN AREA

PRESENTATION



OCTOBER 2014

INTRODUCTION

The Forum of the Chambers of Commerce of the Adriatic and Ionian Area (AIC Forum) is a transnational network comprising today 45 chambers of commerce from both Italy (in particular, from Adriatic Ionian Italian regions) and other countries (ranging from Croatia to Greece), as well as several other supporting members that are not necessarily chambers of commerce.

From a legal point of view, the AIC Forum is a voluntary transnational, legally recognized non-profit making association established under the Italian law, which was set up in 2001 thanks to the will and far-sightedness of the chambers of commerce of the Ancona and Split founding chambers. The network represented by the AIC Forum aims at strengthening the traditional role of chambers of commerce as areas of mediation of the institutional requests of various economic stakeholders, and at the same time at grasping the new opportunities for the growth of the area specifically created by the recent new scenario of the Adriatic-Ionian Macroregion.

MISSION

The AIC Forum was established after the dramatic events that shook the Balkans and has set itself the priority aim of favouring the economic and social stability of the Adriatic-Ionian Area and creating a solid base for the process of European integration of the countries facing the Adriatic and Ionian Seas.

To date, the geopolitical framework where the AIC Forum acts has radically changed: Slovenia and Croatia are Member States of the European Union and also other Eastern Adriatic countries have started their process to approach community institutions within the framework of the stabilization process, though each of them in different times and with different results.

Nonetheless, the reasons that led to the setting up of the AIC Forum have remained valid over the years, whereby a pressing need for economic, social, environmental and cultural integration has been expressed and a strong emphasis has been laid on the process of European integration and enlargement, with special attention to security and legality.

REFERENCE POLITICAL AND ECONOMIC FRAMEWORK

The Adriatic-Ionian area represents a strategic reference basin for all both from a political and economic viewpoint, and from the viewpoint of commercial trends: 2013 trade registered 26.7 billion euros (exports) and about 6.6 billion euros considering the exports of the Italian Adriatic-Ionian zone (10 regions) with a 0.9% increase on 2012 (sources: Eurostat, ISTAT and national statistical offices of the countries of the Macroregion). The area boasts about 1,800,000 SMEs considering all the countries of the Macroregion and the Italian Adriatic-Ionian zone alone (2011 data, sources: Eurostat, ISTAT and national statistical offices of the countries of the Macroregion).

The Macroregion as a whole does not have homogenous features: of the eight countries involved, only four (i.e. Italy, Slovenia, Croatia and Greece) are Member States of the European Union, while Montenegro, Serbia and Albania are already candidate countries and Bosnia-Herzegovina is a potential candidate country.

Although these differences at social, economic, as well as institutional and legislative level had represented an obstacle to the adoption of common growth-oriented policies at the beginning, over the years and thanks to institutions like the AIC Forum they have not prevented the above mentioned countries from progressively approaching the "*acquis communautaire*", i.e. the complex of rights, legal obligations and political objectives bringing together and binding the Member States of the European Union.

INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

The institutional relations established by the AIC Forum have developed both inside and outside the Adriatic-Ionian area over the years.

Inside the Adriatic-Ionian area, the AIC Forum boasts already well-established collaboration relationships with the **Adriatic-Ionian Initiative**, i.e. the intergovernmental network of the eight countries involved in the Macroregional Strategy (Italy, Croatia, Slovenia, Greece, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Serbia, Montenegro and Albania) and most important promoter of the EUSAIR Strategy, as well as with the **Adriatic-Ionian Euroregion**, the **Forum of the Adriatic and Ionian Cities and Towns**, the **Uniadriion** university network and the Adriatic Protected Areas Network **AdriaPAN**.

Evidence of this includes the several initiatives carried out jointly, as well as the signing of the **Declaration of intentions for the Integrated Adriatic-Ionian Secretariat** between the Permanent Secretariat of the Adriatic-Ionian Initiative and three forums (i.e. AIC Forum, Forum of Adriatic and Ionian Cities and Towns and Uniadriion) during the 13th Edition of the AIC Forum in Međugorje in 2013. The signing of the declaration aims at reinforcing the cooperation between the civil society represented by the forums and the All Permanent Secretariat and bring its voice and experience to the attention of all European institutions and the individual governments of the countries of the area.

The AIC Forum is strongly engaged also outside the borders of the Adriatic-Ionian Macroregion. Several initiatives are carried out jointly with the Association of Mediterranean Chambers of Commerce (**ASCAME**), with which the AIC Forum signed an agreement protocol in 2008 with the aim of enhancing cooperation and partnership opportunities in various areas, thereby sharing the activities of the Committees and the Workgroups that both associations work with.

Worth mentioning is also the Memorandum of Understanding signed with the Central European Initiative (**INCE**) on the occasion of the 11th Edition of the AIC Forum in Budva (Montenegro) in 2011, which aims at reinforcing relations and cooperation within projects on sectors of common interest as well as attracting additional international resources, i.e. European funds, for the co-financing of AIC Forum and INCE respective projects and activities especially related to South-Eastern Europe.

In 2011 the AIC Forum was granted a significant recognition with its appointment as “Correspondent member” of the **EUROCHAMBRES** network, i.e. as a member on a par with other networking institutions or national unions of chambers of commerce, which do not belong to the European Union and support this important European network of chambers of commerce.

On the occasion of the 12th annual Edition of the AIC Forum held in Brindisi in 2012 an agreement protocol between the AIC Forum and Insuleur (i.e. the network of insular chambers of commerce of the European Union, established in 2000 following the decision by a number chambers of commerce from France, Greece, Spain and Italy) was signed with the aim of strengthening relations and cooperation on common projects.

Worth pointing out is also the involvement of the AIC Forum in **NECSTouR** (i.e. the European network of regions for the development of sustainable and competitive tourism) as Associated Partner, thereby highlighting the attention paid by the AIC Forum to the topic of sustainable tourism also in view of the virtuous experience made with the **ADRION** label.

EUROPEAN ACCREDITATION

Ever since its establishment the AIC Forum has aimed at strengthening its pro-European attitude through a difficult accreditation process at the institutions of the European Union. This accreditation process started in 2006 and continued over the years with major achievements, including the now well established patronage granted to the AIC Forum by the European



Parliament, the EESC, the European Commission and the Committee of the Regions during the various annual editions of the association.

The AIC Forum has its operational headquarters in Belgium at the Brussels office of the SSB asbl association of the Italian national Union of Chambers of Commerce Unioncamere, which has supported the AIC Forum since its foundation and officially joined it as ordinary member in 2013. This was further recognition by the entire Italian system of chambers of commerce of the work carried out by the AIC Forum.

The relationship with European institutions is increasingly necessary, as the system of Chambers of commerce is called upon by the European Union to play an increasingly active and strategic role in managing financing for the development of SMEs, which are reference interlocutors for many European policies (e.g. the European Parliament initiative of the European SME Week, which has often seen the participation by the AIC Forum, the Small Business Act and the recent 2014-2020 COSME Programme).

WORKING METHODOLOGY

As an institution expressing the needs of civil society and specifically of the enterprises and their professional associations, since its establishment the AIC Forum has been engaged in the analysis of the economic and social situation of individual areas, the assessment of their differences and the search of solutions that might be mutually beneficial.

To better coordinate its activities and based on the results of these first years of analysis and reciprocal knowledge, common priority topics were identified and six **theme-specific workgroups were created, i.e. agriculture, the environment, women entrepreneurship, fisheries and aquaculture, transport and tourism.**

From a methodological viewpoint the AIC Forum organizes an annual itinerant edition on the issues of interest for enterprises; this edition is also the occasion for the theme-specific workgroups to meet.

The AIC Forum has furthermore equipped itself of an outstanding body: the **International Court of the Adriatic and Ionian Area.** This body was set up with the task of promoting methods that are alternative to ordinary justice for the settlement of disputes between the economic and commercial players of the cross-border areas concerned, like international mediation and arbitration, thereby trying to guarantee quality services at affordable prices in the Macroregional area, which is currently undergoing a rapid development.

The AIC Forum annual edition is periodically accompanied by other initiatives, like BtoB meetings, training courses, technical seminars, participation in trade fairs, technology transfer initiatives, etc. These are generally self-financed, yet they are increasingly organized within the framework of crossborder and/or transnational projects that are co-funded with extraordinary European, national and regional resources and as such do not burden or only partly burden on the AIC Forum, the promoters or the businesses involved.

The possibility of better intercepting these resources has improved since 2010, when the AIC Forum established a **Workgroup on EU Project Management.** The latter was set up with the *ad hoc* purpose of tapping EU resources and is supported by the work of experts in the field coming from several of the chambers of commerce involved.

Since its establishment and thanks to the work of this Workgroup the AIC Forum has carried out an extensive EU project management activity on EU calls for proposals and initiatives, whose beneficiaries have been the AIC Forum itself or some of its member chambers that have been indirectly involved thanks to the mediation of the AIC Forum. Financial activities on several topics have thus been activated, specifically tourism, innovation, intellectual property protection and several other activities that can favour the development of SMEs.

From this viewpoint and against the background of the new scenario offered by the Macroregional strategy the AIC Forum will work to promote the relations that have already been established

with other networks, as well as other peculiarities arising from the direct relation with the world of enterprises and business players.
Worth mentioning is the experience of the ADRION label.



Inspired by a Corinthian column, whose shaft recalls a Roman amphitheatre and whose capital reminds of a wave in the sea, this trademark is like an “Indicazione Geografica Tipica”, i.e. a quality certification of origin testifying to a common and strongly shared identity by the AIC Forum member organizations.

As a brand registered and owned by the AIC Forum, ADRION aims at helping the tourist operators of its reference area to have more strength when they offer the destination on international tourist circuits, supporting the growth of weaker tourist areas by linking them with other areas that have a stronger tourism tradition, and giving consumers/tourists the possibility to immediately identify the services and products in the area with the area itself. All those organizations that carry out an integrated and joint promotion of the Adriatic and Ionian tourist area and share the dictates indicated in the brand mission are allowed to use the "Adrlon" logo.

ADRION has specifications and a Trademark Management Committee, whose aim is to coordinate and monitor the use of the tourist label.

The ADRION brand was initially created with purposes of tourist promotion. Today, also thanks to the fact that it was officially recognized as a reference “best practice” in the **European Commission Communication no. 713 of 30th November 2012** on the Maritime Strategy for the Adriatic and Ionian Seas and above all within the new macroregional context, it has taken on a new and more far-reaching task of quality certification of origin that does not only refer to tourism, but also to manufacturing supply chains, promotional campaigns of the various areas and events.

More information is available at: <http://www.adrion.forumaic.org/>

FUTURE PROSPECTS: ADVANTAGES AND OBSTACLES

In today's historical, political and economic context the European Union has asked each individual Member State and business players to do their best to guarantee a stronger and better impact of economic development policies on individual territories, also in relation with the use of the financial resources made available by the European Union.

It is precisely against this background that the establishment of new macroregional strategies is justified, as their aim is to identify the most pressing needs and the main problems of a given area and face these issues and criticalities.

It is precisely within this context that, also thanks to the AIC Forum contribution during the phase of stakeholder consultation, the new Adriatic-Ionian Macroregional Strategy, i.e. the third Macroregion recognized by the European Union after the Baltic and Danube macroregional strategies, will be launched.

Since its establishment in 2001 the AIC Forum has proven its ability to grasp the needs of the individual areas and businesses of the Adriatic-Ionian region, i.e. an area with common traits and problems that few other public administrations had been able to identify.

Since then the AIC Forum has represented one of the most important and active reference interlocutors and supporters of the Adriatic-Ionian Initiative, with the same European Commission officially mentioning it in its communication on “A Maritime Strategy for the Adriatic and Ionian Seas” of 30th December 2013, COM(2012) 713 final.

Thanks to the AIC Forum, in recent years the Italian system of chambers of commerce has been considered one of the reference stakeholders of the public consultation promoted by the European Commission on the EUSAIR Strategy and was indicated as a reference player also for



the future implementation stage of the macroregional strategy in the **European Commission Communication of 17th June 2014 on the European Union Strategy for the Adriatic and Ionian Region, COM(2014) 357 final**, and related **Action Plan**.

It is worth reminding that, also thanks to the activity of networks like the AIC Forum, the progressive consolidation of the relations between the institutions working in the area of the Macroregion has spontaneously favoured the creation of a common market, which, though little regulated, has affirmed itself beyond political divisions and territorial disputes.

The level of connection between the economies of the Macroregion is already a fact and it has now become impossible to separate the trend of a country from that of the others. This is clearly shown by the events that have taken place over the last few years when facing the economic recession that hit the world economic system.

The strong concentration of the international trade of the AIC Forum member countries in destinations within the Adriatic-Ionian area has shown that we are facing a market, whose needs and rules are gradually getting in line with the ones of the European single market, although no formal agreements similar to the ones characterising the European single market exist.

In the future, this will make it increasingly necessary to agree on procedures that aim at facilitating the circulation of goods and providing for safe, transparent and sustainable transactions.

This objective can be more easily reached with an organism acting at supranational level, which is credible and recognized, as well as able to harmonize market rules without ignoring the specific needs of the various countries.

This organism will be undoubtedly represented by the **Adriatic-Ionian Macroregion**, within which each institutional level will be called upon to give its contribution: the local and national levels will play a crucial role in creating a space and achieving an objective of territorial cooperation, which will make it possible to solve common problems with positive repercussions on all citizens.

This strategy will be able to translate the concepts of territorial cohesion, environmental protection, sustainable economic and social development into practice without creating additional entities and resorting to already existing networks,

The AIC Forum intends to continue to act as one of the protagonists of this ambitious project.

The Adriatic-Ionian Macroregion is an innovative form of territorial cooperation between different regions, countries and civil society organizations, which pursue the common objective of achieving sustainable development and fully sharing common cultural heritage. As such, it therefore acts as a “functional area” that can potentially favour better policies, a better use of resources and more efficient and effective actions by the various players involved, each for their area of competence.

The identification of priority topics (i.e. the so-called “pillars” of the Macroregion) within the Action Plan, which was published in June 2014, shows the clear willingness to concentrate efforts to pursue the objectives set in shorter time and with more strength.

Specifically, these objectives concern issues that also chambers of commerce have long paid attention too: protecting the sea and coastal environment, improving accessibility and communications (highways of the sea, safety and security of navigation and ports, etc.), developing sustainable forms tourism for tourists to enjoy as well as for the promotion of local areas, the blue economy in all its aspects in terms of products and services. All these issues are characterized by the cross-sector topics of innovation, research and support to SMEs, as well as “capacity” and “institutional building” as a continuous process for the improvement of organizations and institutions.

- This is the new scenario in which the chambers of commerce of the area will be called upon to give their contribution in the future to reinforce ongoing democratic processes, also through a coordination of local development policies that can speed up the European integration process of some countries on the one hand and promote growth and employment for all on the other.

The above objectives are believed to be better pursued by a body acting within a network, which can guarantee communication and an exchange of other territorial realities, promote opportunities to start initiatives of mutual interest, rationalize the use of public and private financial resources coming from various sources and above all reinforce its role at European and international level. The AIC Forum will be called upon, together with other networks, to contribute to the Macroregional Strategy through a “multigovernance” approach, whose task will be to guarantee a more balanced and rational management of power between the various stakeholders in a logic of consultation, capable of guaranteeing more effective and efficient measures in the above mentioned sectors.

The previously mentioned Declaration of intentions signed by the Permanent Secretariat of the Adriatic-Ionian Initiative and three forums (i.e. AIC Forum, Forum of Adriatic and Ionian Cities and Towns and Uniadriatic university network) in 2013, which promotes and strengthens networks' commitment also for the next stage of implementation of the Macroregional Strategy, and the setting up of the Adriatic-Ionian Intergroup of the European Committee of the Regions (i.e. a body composed by all political groups represented in the European Parliament) have clearly outlined the reference context for future actions.

The AIC Forum is ready to play its part against this backdrop. It intends to do so by reinforcing the role and functions of the chambers of commerce and the chambers of the economy of the area and taking full advantage of its strategic vision and spontaneous attitude to favour networking initiatives between the public and the private sector, which have always characterised the system of chambers of commerce.

This will add on to the technical and project management skills developed thanks to the direct contact with the business world, the ability to tap extraordinary European and international funds and the full availability to integrate with the European, as well as the national and regional policies implemented in individual territories, thereby always considering the common needs of the SMEs represented by the same chambers of commerce and thus going beyond local differences. These are the priorities to start from, towards which it is possible to contribute by joining the AIC Forum.



REFERENCE INFORMATION ON THE AIC FORUM

PRESIDENT Mr. Rodolfo Giampieri, President of the Ancona Chamber of Commerce.

VICE_PRESIDENT Mr. Velimir MIJUŠKOVIĆ, President of the Chamber of the Economy of Montenegro;

SECRETARY-GENERAL Mr. Michele De Vita, Secretary-General of the Ancona Chamber of Commerce

Founding members

<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Ancona Chamber of Commerce	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Croatian Chamber of Commerce – County of Split
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Ordinary members

<p><u>ITALY</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Ascoli Piceno Chamber of Commerce• Chamber of Commerce of Bari• Chamber of Commerce of Brindisi• Chamber of Commerce of Campobasso• Fermo Chamber of Commerce• Ferrara Chamber of Commerce• Chamber of Commerce of L'Aquila• Macerata Chamber of Commerce• Matera Chamber of Commerce• Chamber of Commerce of Pesaro• Chamber of Commerce of Pescara• Pordenone Chamber of Commerce• Chamber of Commerce of Ravenna• Reggio Calabria Chamber of Commerce• Chamber of Commerce of Rimini• Chamber of Commerce of Teramo• Chamber of Commerce of Trieste• Udine Chamber of Commerce• Union of Italian Chambers of Commerce Unioncamere• Marche Regional Union of Chambers of Commerce• Veneto Regional Union of Chambers of Commerce• Calabria Regional Union of Chambers of Commerce <p><u>BOSNIA HERZEGOVINA</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Chamber of the Economy of the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina:	<p><u>CROATIA</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Chamber of the Economy of Dubrovnik• Chamber of Commerce of Pula• Chamber of Commerce of Rijeka• Chamber of the Economy of Šibenik• Chamber of the Economy of Zadar <p><u>MONTENEGRO</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Chamber of the Economy of Montenegro <p><u>ALBANIA</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Chamber of Commerce and Industry of Durres• Chamber of Commerce and Industry of Lezhe• Chamber of Commerce and Industry of Tirana <p><u>GREECE</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Chamber of Commerce and Industry of Corfu• Chamber of Commerce and Industry of Thesprotia• Chamber of Commerce and Industry of Aetoloakarnania• Chamber of Commerce and Industry of Ioannina• Chamber of Commerce and Industry of Preveza• Chamber of Commerce and Industry of Achaia• Chamber of Commerce and Industry of Ileia• Chamber of the Economy of Ioannina
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Supporting members

<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Province of Ancona• Italian Nautical Association Assonautica, Rome	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Chamber of Commerce and Industry of Serbia
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(*) Annex: Declaration of commitment of the AIC Forum

CONTACTS

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