



## VIII Adriatic and Ionian Council / EUSAIR Ministerial Meeting Sarajevo Declaration

24 May 2023

**We, the Representatives of the Governments of Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Greece, Italy, Montenegro, North Macedonia, San Marino, Serbia and Slovenia**, meeting in Sarajevo, with the participation of the **European Commission**, in the framework of the 8<sup>th</sup> Forum of the European Union Strategy for the Adriatic and Ionian Region (EUSAIR):

**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 (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 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;

**REAFFIRMING** the importance of the strategic partnership between the EU and the Western Balkan region, and **ACKNOWLEDGING** that the experience of 23 years of cooperation among Adriatic Ionian Initiative (AII) Governments and the cooperation within the EU Strategy for the Adriatic and Ionian region (EUSAIR) has benefitted the stability of the area;

**APPRECIATING** the valuable contribution brought by EUSAIR in strengthening the regional cooperation dimension in key policy areas for the future of the region and their positive impact in leveraging support to reforms fostering sustainable socioeconomic recovery and development, bringing candidate countries closer to the Union's values and standards;

**STRESSING** that the Russian aggression against Ukraine represents a flagrant breach of international law and a critical threat to overall security, including the values of democracy, rule of law, respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms, shared by all AII/EUSAIR participating countries;

\*

\*

\*

1. **CONDEMN** in the strongest terms the ongoing unprovoked and unjustified military aggression of the Russian Federation against Ukraine;
2. **EXPRESS** our solidarity with the people of Ukraine, **REITERATE** full support to the country's sovereignty, independence, unity and territorial integrity, within its internationally recognised borders, including territorial waters and **ENCOURAGE** to support Ukraine now and in contributing to the recovery and reconstruction of Ukraine after the war;
3. **REMAIN** determined to strengthen the free and open international order based on the rule of law, respect for the UN Charter, the sovereignty, and territorial integrity, within internationally recognized borders, of all States, and respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms;
4. **UNDERLINE** that continuing with a vigorous promotion of EU integration and sustainable development - also in the framework of the AII/EUSAIR – contributes to the right response to the current challenging situation, ultimately ensuring the consolidation of the rules-based multilateral order; **RECONFIRM** the full and unequivocal commitment of the Western Balkans to the European Union membership perspective, which represents a geostrategic investment for a stable, strong and united Europe, and **CALL** for renewed commitment and creative approach from all key stakeholders towards delivering a meaningful contribution to the acceleration of the enlargement process;
5. **RECOGNISE** the progress made by the Western Balkans AII/EUSAIR participating countries on their respective EU paths since the Tirana Declaration in May 2022;
6. **WELCOME** the status of EU candidate country granted to Bosnia and Herzegovina, and **EXPRESS** readiness to assist the country on the path towards accession in all possible ways with guidance and expertise;
7. **WELCOME** the holding of the first intergovernmental conferences with the Republic of Albania and the Republic of North Macedonia as a significant step toward their accession to the EU;
8. **ENCOURAGE** the AII/EUSAIR participating countries, candidates to the EU membership, to remain focused on reforms aimed at demonstrating their adherence to the European values, standards and principles;

9. **EMPHASIZE** that cooperation in the framework of the AII/EUSAIR is instrumental for further facilitating EU candidate countries' paths towards EU integration; **ACKNOWLEDGE** the AII and EUSAIR's role in supporting EU candidate countries on the path towards EU integration and **WELCOME** "EU Enlargement" as a cross-cutting issue as emerged within the works for revising the EUSAIR Action Plan;
10. **NOTE** that the Adriatic-Ionian area comprises of five EU candidate countries and **STRESS** the importance of EUSAIR and AII in further strengthening cooperation with these future prospective members of the EU. This cooperation is necessary to address common challenges and detect opportunities and should be accordingly reflected, encouraged and enhanced in the revised Strategy and its Action Plan;
11. **WELCOME** the progress achieved on the Strategy revision and **CALL** for a dedicated, constructive, and proactive approach to its continuation in the future respecting the agreed timeline. **CALL** for additional efforts to focus on the challenges posed by climate change and the green and digital transition, **WELCOME** the agreement to establish a Social Pillar as the fifth Pillar of the EUSAIR;
12. **STRESS** the importance of energy security and **CALL** on all AII/EUSAIR participating countries to pursue activities in saving energy, producing clean energy and diversifying energy supplies in line with the objectives of the REPowerEU Plan;
13. **RECOGNISE** the prominent role of research, innovation, smart specialisation, circular economy, education and culture as essential drivers for green and digital transition of the economy and society, as tools of regional cooperation and for addressing the long-standing challenges faced by young people in the region;
14. **WELCOME** the EU Sustainable Blue Economy approach to enhance governance with ecosystem services and goods on transboundary, sub-regional, regional and global level;
15. **ACKNOWLEDGE** the need for more analytical and accurate data on the overall impact of the Strategy, including in terms of fund mobilisation for the implementation of the Strategy. Comprehensive monitoring and evaluation mechanisms are needed for maintaining political support and would help key implementers to better understand the Strategy's strengths and weaknesses. And therefore, **CALL** on the EUSAIR implementers to foresee appropriate tools and mechanisms, including in the process of revision of the Strategy;

16. **WELCOME** the efforts made in embedding the Strategy in all cohesion policy and IPA programmes, enabling thus financing of the Strategy priorities through existing funds, and **CALL** for further effort during the implementation of the programmes;
17. **ACKNOWLEDGE** the efforts deployed in the involvement of the managing authorities of the ETC programmes to support the EUSAIR embedding process and **CALL** for the long-term establishment of Cohesion programmes' managing authority networks and National IPA Coordinators networks in the Strategy to facilitate funding from EU, national and regional programmes;
18. **WELCOME** the Presidency's activities aimed at strengthening regional cooperation in areas such as equal opportunities and women's entrepreneurship, United Nations Sustainable Development Goals, and youth empowerment;
19. **UNDERLINE** the importance of implementation of the objectives of the European Green Deal, the new Approach for a Sustainable Blue Economy in the EU, the Green Agenda for the Western Balkans, the European Green Agenda, and the UN 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the Sustainable Development Goals in all AII/EUSAIR participating countries, and **COMMEND** the Bosnia and Herzegovina AII/EUSAIR Presidency on related conference on the midterm state of play of SDGs implementation in the region.
20. **RECOGNISE** the importance of the Strategy in further harmonizing local and regional action with European policies and priorities, notably via platforms based on participatory planning in the Strategy;
21. **WELCOME** the positive outcomes of the AII/EUSAIR Trio meetings and **SUGGEST** to give continuity to them;
22. **ENCOURAGE** future EUSAIR Trio Presidencies to actively pursue synergies and cooperation with other macro-regional strategies;
23. **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, fostering greater tolerance and democratic participation, promoting European values and strengthening the cohesion of society;
24. **HIGHLIGHT** the continued need to facilitate the involvement of civil society organisations, businesses, local and regional stakeholders and youth in the

implementation of the Strategy and develop formats to enable their engagements and **SUPPORT** the AII/EUSAIR participating countries in building cooperation with youth, especially in the form of the establishment of EUSAIR Youth Council, in order to foster young leadership and ensure inclusion of issues of importance to youth into the work of AII/EUSAIR;

25. **RECOGNIZE** the important role that youth can play in the development of the Adriatic Ionian region and **ENCOURAGE** to undertake further activities to foster youth empowerment, including their active engagement in implementing EUSAIR priorities and relevant EU policies, such as Cohesion Policy; **COMMEND** the Presidency for further supporting all the existing youth related projects, including Young POPRI network, and **ENCOURAGE** each of the future Chairmanships to continue to do so;
26. **COMMEND** the efforts made by the AII Permanent Secretariat in granting financial support to the realization of internships, scholarships and high schools projects to enhance youth empowerment and face the severe consequences of brain drain;
27. **BUILD** on the lessons learned to further expand on participatory and consultation mechanisms, especially with youth, and fully utilise already existing mechanisms, such as the EU Youth Dialogue and ensure the outcomes are followed up and considered during the decision-making processes;
28. **TAKE NOTE** of the positive outcomes of the first two editions of the AII-CEI joint project “IMAGINE” Active Young Citizens for Sustainable Development in CEI and AII areas, **WELCOME** the results of its third edition, and **ENCOURAGE** the AII to develop similar initiatives with regional organizations in the future;
29. **UNDERLINE** the importance of Strategy implementers to be empowered with clear mandates, effective decision-making capacity, necessary political backing that places their work in the broader policy context and a clear vision of the Strategy and **INVITE** participating countries to further reinforce the engagement of local and regional stakeholders in the Strategy;
30. **RECOGNISE** the importance of ensuring future continuation of all functions of the governance support necessary for effective and smooth implementation of EUSAIR in all participating countries provided through Interreg IPA ADRION EUSAIR governance support projects; and **APPRECIATE** the support provided by EUSAIR Facility Point so far;

31. **ACKNOWLEDGE** the importance of interaction among the secretariats of regional organizations in order to further develop synergies and exchange experience, best practices and know-how; and **CONGRATULATE** the AII Permanent Secretariat, chosen to host the 17<sup>th</sup> Coordination Meeting of Regional Organizations;
32. **COMMEND** the AII Permanent Secretariat on its coordination of the AII activities and its efforts aimed to maintain efficient links with the EUSAIR pillars as well as the civil society;
33. **APPRECIATE** the contribution brought forward by the three Fora of the Chambers of Commerce, of the Cities, of the Universities of the Adriatic Ionian Region, **COMMEND** them on organizing several events gathering large groups of stakeholders from various sectors of society helping to consolidate the relationship between civil society, local, regional, national and EU Institutions. **ENCOURAGE** them to make additional efforts towards their stakeholders in implementing EUSAIR priorities and **INVITE** them to strengthen their coordination with EUSAIR;
34. **CONVINCED** that the role of AII Parliaments is of capital importance and that their closer cooperation will boost the existing excellent neighbourly relations among our peoples, **CALL ON** all to find effective way to deal with the crucial issues of the Adriatic Ionian region, including the debate focused on enlargement;
35. **ENDORSE** the decision of the Committee of Senior Officials to renew the mandate of the AII Secretary General for a further period of three years;
36. **CONGRATULATE** Bosnia and Herzegovina on its successful chairmanship over the AII and EUSAIR and, achieving many objectives as outlined in the Annexes to this declaration;
37. **THANK** Bosnia and Herzegovina and the City of Sarajevo for the excellent organization and hospitality offered on the occasion of the AIC/EUSAIR ministerial meeting and the 8th EUSAIR Forum;
38. **ENTRUST** the incoming AII/EUSAIR Chairmanship from 1 June 2023 to 31 May 2024 to the Republic of Croatia wishing them all the success in performing their tasks.

## ANNEX I

### **Achievements of Bosnia and Herzegovina AII Chairmanship**

- The AII Bosnia and Herzegovina Chairmanship organized numerous AII Round Tables:
  - 9th REDETE Conference named “Present and future challenges in regional development in the Adriatic-Ionian Region”, organized by the Marche Polytechnic University in cooperation with the University of Banja Luka, the AII Permanent Secretariat and the AII BiH Chairmanship, on 15-16 September 2022 (Ancona, Italy).
  - Conference on “Women’s economic empowerment: fostering new synergies in the Adriatic and Ionian macro-region”, organized by the Agency for Gender Equality of Bosnia and Herzegovina, Ministry for Human Rights and Refugees of Bosnia and Herzegovina, in cooperation with the AII PS and UN Women, on 12-14 October 2022 (Ilidža, Bosnia and Herzegovina).
  - Round Table on Interuniversity Cooperation on "Recovery plan for Interuniversity Cooperation in the Adriatic - Ionian Region: What can we expect in the next 3-year time?" organized by UniAdrion in cooperation with the AII Permanent Secretariat, the University of Zenica and the AII BiH Chairmanship on November 28th in Zenica (Bosnia and Herzegovina).
  - Conference on "Mid-term Evaluation of the implementation of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals in AII member states", organized by Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Bosnia and Herzegovina in its capacity of the Chairmanship-in-Office to the AII and EUSAIR (together with Directorate for European Integrations of Bosnia and Herzegovina) and Government of Republika Srpska with the support of the BH Council for Monitoring and Evaluation of the SDG Agenda 2030 implementation and United Nations and UNDP Office in Bosnia and Herzegovina, on 4-5 May 2023 in Banja Luka, Bosnia and Herzegovina.
  - Round Table on "Candidacy status of Bosnia and Herzegovina and EU Funds - Opportunities and Perspectives" held on 3 May 2023 in Mostar within the framework of the Mostar Economic Forum.
  - Round Table named "Better together: academic and business world for social, cultural, economic growth of the Adriatic-Ionian Region", organized by the Fora of Civil Society in cooperation with the AII Permanent Secretariat and the AII BiH Chairmanship, within the framework of the EUSAIR Annual Forum in Sarajevo on 25 May 2023.
  
- The AII Trio plus Secretariat meeting took place on October 5<sup>th</sup> 2022 (Sarajevo) and on March 15<sup>th</sup> 2023 (Brussels), along with the EUSAIR Trio Presidency meeting, as an innovative and constructive mechanism to assure the continuity and synergy of the AII and EUSAIR activities;
  
- The AII Permanent Secretariat organized, under the BiH Chairmanship, and within the framework of the 16<sup>th</sup> ed. of the Adriatic Mediterranean Festival, 31 August – 4

September 2022 in Ancona, a conference *called* "The Bosnia of yesterday and today, the lesson of that war" to reflect on the atrocities of the war thirty years after the siege of Sarajevo.

- The AII 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.
  - A University course called "Adriatic-Ionian Cooperation" related to European integration and the political-economic development of the countries involved in the AII/EUSAIR (within the master's degree in "international economics").
  - The 3<sup>rd</sup> edition of the initiative "*IMAGINE - Active Young Citizens for Sustainable Development in CEI and AII areas*", co-organized by the CEI and AII Secretariats, designed to stimulate the engagement of youth in the Central European Initiative and the Adriatic Ionian Initiative regions in order to raise awareness on the UN Agenda 2030 and its 17 Sustainable Development Goals.
  - The AII Internships Programme, named Western Balkanship, organized 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, with the aim of 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 AII Permanent Secretariat took part in the 16th Coordination Meeting of Regional Organizations held at the Permanent International Secretariat of the Black Sea Economic Cooperation Organization (BSEC), in Istanbul, Türkiye on 8 December 2022. The event gave participants the chance to present their respective activities in promoting regional dialogue and cooperation and exchange views and good practices with focus on blue economy activities, climate change and UN SDGs' implementation.