



REPUBLIC OF SLOVENIA
MINISTRY OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS



ADRIATIC AND IONIAN INITIATIVE
CHAIRMANSHIP OF THE REPUBLIC OF SLOVENIA
JUNE 2020-MAY 2021

SLOVENIA'S CHAIRMANSHIP OF THE ADRIATIC AND IONIAN INITIATIVE (JUNE 2020–MAY 2021)

On 1 June 2020, Slovenia formally took over the one-year Chairmanship of the Adriatic and Ionian Initiative (AI) and the EU Strategy of the Adriatic and Ionian Region (EUSAIR). The Chairmanship was previously held by Serbia and will be passed on to Albania in June 2021.

The idea of regional integration in the wider area of the Adriatic and Ionian sea basins stems from the endeavours of the international community to enhance peace, democracy, human rights and economic development as stated in the 1999 Stability Pact for South Eastern Europe. Based on these commitments, the Ancona Declaration was signed in 2000 with the aim of enhancing Adriatic and Ionian cooperation in the areas of common interest and promoting political and economic stability as a solid foundation in the European integration process of the Western Balkans.

The AI member states share the area around the Adriatic and Ionian seas. This territory is so strongly interlinked and co-dependent that joint care and coordinated action are urgently needed. An open dialogue, enhanced cooperation and mutual commitment to shared values are the key elements of the regional identity and a precondition for enhancing the development potential of the Adriatic and Ionian area.

Exciting development possibilities at the level of entities were recently also recognised by the EU, which has contributed considerably to the revitalised integration in the Adriatic and Ionian area through the macro-regional approach to its management. The establishment of an innovative model of mutual action of the AI and EUSAIR is undoubtedly a significant upgrade, which guarantees higher efficiency and greater consistency in policies and projects.

As an Adriatic, Mediterranean and coastal state, Slovenia has attached great importance to the AI since its establishment in 2000. Its participation in the initiative is grounded in firm support to enhanced integration in business, culture, science and other fields, which brings high added value to both EU member and non-member states. The initiative is an efficient platform for addressing and resolving common issues, and, besides the concrete socio-economic aspects, it successfully promotes the principles and values of democracy, good neighbourly relations and equal participation without exclusion, which is why Slovenia will continue to actively strive for joint policy shaping and continued development in the future.

SLOVENIA'S ALL CHAIRMANSHIP PRIORITIES AND PROGRAMME

The primary goal of integration within the Adriatic and Ionian region is promoting sustainable economic and social welfare and enhancing the attractiveness, competitiveness and regional connectivity, while fostering sustainable development of the hinterland, as well as the coastal and marine ecosystems, with the emphasis on health as a horizontal topic.

During the tenure of All Chairmanship, Slovenia will continue its activities aimed at upgrading this type of regional cooperation and consolidating the initiative as a regional structure, leaning on the previously agreed and initiated activities of its predecessors.

The priorities of the Slovenian Chairmanship will address challenges in the following domains:

- 1) **Infrastructural connectivity** – The Adriatic and Ionian region is highly fragmented, causing infrastructural disparities, especially between EU member and non-member states. Better transport and energy connections are critical for the economic and social development of the region. In transport, it is essential to improve the competitiveness of Adriatic and Ionian ports and to build traffic infrastructure, which would improve the connectivity between the coastal area and the hinterland. Along with the third pillar of EUSAIR, Slovenia places particular emphasis on the ecological connectivity of blue and green corridors/infrastructure.
- 2) **Culture and tourism** – With its innumerable natural features and cultural and historical monuments, the All region is undoubtedly one of the most attractive tourist destinations in the world. At the same time, tourism is one of the fastest growing industries, thus providing a wealth of opportunities to create jobs. When it comes to sustainable tourism, the development potential of the region could be given a boost by forming innovative, joint and coordinated tourist offers, focusing on different types of sustainable tourism and exploiting cultural heritage potentials.
- 3) **Youth issues** – Brain drain, workforce migration, discrepancies in the labour market and the high unemployment rate among the young have been a burning issue for years, causing the loss of potential and narrowing the development perspective in the Western Balkans. Finding long-term and comprehensive solutions to youth issues requires constant attention at both the national and international levels.
- 4) **Digitalisation** will be one of Slovenia's EU Presidency priorities in the second half of next year. The horizontal nature of this topic lends itself well to an extensive debate on the range of digitalisation aspects having a profound impact on the dynamic of relations in the region, notably in education and science, enhanced capacities of cities and businesses, improved connectivity, and gender equality.

In the light of the ongoing challenges related to the Covid-19 pandemic, the Chairmanship will touch on current health and humanitarian situations, and the organisation of events during this period will definitely depend on the epidemiological situation in the region.

During its Chairmanship, Slovenia will make every effort to follow through with all the round table discussions covering all areas agreed-upon in accordance with EUSAIR thematic priorities. In doing so, it will promote the active participation of the Fora of civil society (Chambers of Commerce, Cities and Universities) that have already proven to be crucial partners with important contributions to addressing systemic challenges in the fields of common interest. The Chairmanship will provide an excellent opportunity to raise broad public awareness on the advantages and achievements of regional cooperation within the All, as well as to attract new institutions and stakeholders to join in.

Slovenia wishes to seize the opportunity to bring to the fore the priorities of the Slovenian Presidency of the Council of the EU in the second half of 2021, in particular digitalisation, the green agenda and the European perspective of the Western Balkan countries. Since Slovenia and Bosnia and Herzegovina coordinate activities under the third pillar of EUSAIR – preservation, protection and improvement of environmental quality, the above-mentioned priorities will provide a stepping stone for further deepening the cooperation between All and EUSAIR.

The following is a list of events that we are planning to organise as regular or ad hoc round table discussions:

- 1) A round table discussion marking the 60th anniversary of the Faculty of Maritime Studies and Transport of the University of Ljubljana to address maritime cooperation and transport connectivity (co-organised by UNIADRION).
- 2) A round table discussion to encourage cooperation between Chambers of Commerce with the aim of improving economic connectivity, and lowering unemployment and workforce migration from the Western Balkan region (co-organised by the Forum of Chambers of Commerce and the Forum of Cities).
- 3) A round table discussion on environmental protection, tourism, culture and science – smart specialisation in All members (in cooperation with relevant ministries).
- 4) A round table discussion on civil protection response and activities during the Covid-19 pandemic (co-organised by the Ministry of Defence and the Administration for Civil Protection and Disaster Relief).
- 5) Ad hoc round table discussion on gender equality and the empowerment of women organised by the Slovenian Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

Besides round table discussions, Slovenia will also focus on the **parliamentarian aspect of the Adriatic and Ionian Initiative** which offers an excellent platform for broad discussions that could attract wider audiences and garner political support for government orientations and projects. A conference of presidents of Parliaments is scheduled to take place in the spring months of the Slovenian Chairmanship.

During its one-year mandate, Slovenia will rely on the valuable expert assistance of the All Permanent Secretariat in Ancona. As All chair, it is ready to cooperate with relevant bodies and institutions of member countries to ensure synergies among our activities, while remaining open to any suggestion regarding new projects aimed at enhancing our cooperation.