

THE FUTURE OF THE EUROPEAN UNION STRATEGY FOR THE ADRIATIC-IONIAN REGION

Macro-regional policies for companies, communities and institutions

Contribution for the re-launch of the governance model of EUSAIR Strategy
Ancona (Italy), April 7th 2022, Teatro delle Muse – Sala del ridotto

SESSION I: A BRAND NEW VISION OF EUROPE. EUSAIR AND THE ENLARGEMENT PROCESS

How can your institution enable the EUSAIR to favour the Enlargement process? What kind of value do you attribute to EUSAIR and its soft policy approach in a moment such as this one when power politics becomes the new normal and the WB fear new political instability?

- Since the endorsement of the EUSAIR, the All have strived to **align the intergovernmental instrument with the new EU Strategy** in order to avoid duplication and to foster coherence between the two initiatives. In this regard, the All has assumed the new role of “**Advocate of Civil Society Organizations**” within the macroregional process, particularly by opening our **Roundtables** to the participation of different stakeholders as well as by coordinating and cooperating with the three civil society Fora based in Ancona (Cities, Chambers, Universities).
- The All had the idea **to bridge the so-called Civil Society** - the Adriatic-Ionian networks and Fora, such as the Forum of the Adriatic and Ionian Chambers of Commerce, the Forum of the Adriatic and Ionian Cities and UniAdrion (the Adriatic Ionian University network) - **with the EUSAIR Strategy**, so as to be able to channel the needs and requests but also ideas and proposals of the Civil Society within this complex mechanism, with a bottom-up approach.
- The Initiative is also characterized by a **parliamentary dimension**. In less than a month, on May 6th 2022, the 18th Conference of the Presidents/Speakers of the Parliaments of the All will take place in Tirana. A **strict cooperation among Parliaments** gives an added value in the effort to push forward the enlargement process and upgrade regional cooperation.
- In addition to the four pillars common to the EUSAIR Strategy, **in recent years the Initiative has worked on further issues** such as the youth dossier, inter-university cooperation, female entrepreneurship and equal opportunities, anti-corruption,

circular economy and labour migration, topics which are key to close the negotiation chapters for a future accession to the European Union.

- **This shows a high degree of complementarity with the EUSAIR, adding a more cultural and social dimension to the economic one which is the key feature of the latter.** The overall result is a comprehensive set of strategies aimed at fostering integration in the region and at bringing it increasingly closer to the European Union.
- The All Presidencies are an important policy tool for rising up the visibility of the presiding country. In particular when this is exercised by an EU candidate country as Albania or as a potential candidate as Bosnia-Herzegovina.
- Additionally, **subsidiarity as the key driving principle and force of the All** raises the level of preparedness for the start of the negotiation process and for the membership.
- The EUSAIR Strategy and the Adriatic-Ionian Initiative are tools to promote the development of the Western Balkan area, which aims **to enhance diversity by harmonizing them in an overall framework**, a single space where different cultures are able to meet and blend with each other.
- The countries of the Western Balkans region share a recent history characterised by violent conflicts, but **thanks to reciprocal dialogue, and also to the strong attraction and influence played by the EU, they are now searching for their way forward**, which will hopefully culminate in their full accession into the “European family”. Today the so-called “Brussels effect” can act as a pull factor to enlarge the EU space, based on democratic and solidarity values.
- **Money is not enough to create and strengthen a true “European spirit”.** Therefore, to support a swift and early achievement of this goal, the contribution of the All is a springboard for cultural and social exchanges, also increasingly involving the younger generations.
- Through internships, scholarships, high school projects and different activities we are trying to develop a European network of young people, reinforce that sense of

belonging to a common European space. Investing in young people in the Western Balkans means investing in our future and strengthening that solid bond of good friendly relations built over the years.

- The enlargement policy has been the EU most **successful foreign policy tool**. The Ukraine tragedy should, at least, serve as a reminder to the European Council that there is still, in the Western Balkans, a "hole" in the very core of the European Union. A hole that must be filled as soon as possible and without hesitation, thanks to a full membership of those who have been waiting to join the European family for too long, which would greatly contribute to strengthening the stability of the entire region.
- The good neighbourly relations and progresses built over the years in the region risks being void if certain times and prospective are not offered to the path of EU integration. In short, we need a change of pace and an acceleration of the integration process of the Western Balkans with a road map that foresees the resumption of the negotiations started with Montenegro and Serbia, the convening of the Intergovernmental Conferences for Albania and North Macedonia, the recognition of Bosnia and Herzegovina of the candidate status.