



Meeting of the Ministers of Foreign Affairs **of the Member States of the Central European Initiative**

24 September 2020

Adriatic and Ionian Initiative Secretary General – Amb. Giovanni Castellaneta

- Honourable Chair, Minister Darmanović, CEI SG Antonione, Ministers, Excellencies...
- I would like to thank you for the organization of this high-level event which shows that, despite the unforeseen circumstances due the pandemic situation, the spirit of our regional cooperation is still alive and strong.
- As you might know, the Adriatic and Ionian Initiative Permanent Secretariat and the Central European Initiative CEI - Executive Secretariat signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) in the occasion of the Adriatic and Ionian Council, held in Budva on May 8th 2019, for a shared action for our respective regions.
- The signature seals a strong long-standing partnership and contributes to fostering regional cooperation and sustainable development. In this regard, let me inform you that in the coming weeks we will start working on the preparation and implementation of activities for the benefit of our common citizens.
- The Adriatic and Ionian Initiative and EUSAIR play a special role as Regional Organizations in the process of the European integration of its non-EU Member States as well as in promoting the sustainable development and economic growth of all its Participating Countries through concrete cooperation activities.
- It is clear that there is room for synergies and for exchanging information and experiences between our intergovernmental / multilateral initiatives, starting with a process of bottom-up involvement of representatives of Civil Society (Municipalities, Universities, Chambers of Commerce) that the All has always promoted through the mechanism of our Round Tables.

- From June 2020, the Chairmanship of the All has been held by the Republic of Slovenia which intends to 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.
- Particular focus has been reserved to the following topics: infrastructural connectivity, culture and tourism, youth issues and digitalization. At the same time, Slovenia will put special attention on the current health and humanitarian situations (as a horizontal topic).
- Together with the tangible outcomes of EUSAIR, let me say that this new form of cooperation is crucial in bringing the two shores of the sea closer to each other, both in terms of institutions and people, making the Adriatic Sea a lake of peace and prosperity.
This is a significant training camp for those Western Balkans Countries that are approaching the EU membership. Cooperation in this context is beneficial as it facilitates their accession process and fosters a democratic, social and economic development in Europe.
- I can assure that the All and its Permanent Secretariat will act to continue to be an essential tool for fostering regional cooperation by further enhancing policy dialogue among the ten All Participating Countries. We will continue to support the European aspirations of the Western Balkan countries, thus representing an impetus to the enlargement and integration process.
- I wish success to the Republic of Montenegro for the rest of their CEI Presidency. We had a great experience working with them during the All Chairmanship.
- Thank you again for the invitation to this meeting.