



Summit of Heads of Government of the CEI

Rome, 19 December 2019

Adriatic and Ionian Initiative Secretary General – Amb. Giovanni Castellaneta

- Madame Chairwoman, CEI SG Antonione, President, Prime Ministers, Excellencies...
- I would like to thank the Italian Government for hosting us today, for the outstanding organization of this high-level event and for the hospitality.
- I join in expressing deep sorrow and solidarity to Prime Minister Rama and to the people of Albania for loss of lives and all those affected by the devastating earthquake.
- Let me first recall the vision and activity in favour of our region of former Italian Foreign Minister, Gianni De Michelis, I had the honour to serve during the early stage of my diplomatic service.
- It is a great pleasure to be here and to share the longstanding regional cooperation experience of the Adriatic and Ionian Initiative in the Western Balkans Region.
- 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. The MoU is a step forward for a joint preparation and implementation of activities in the years to come 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, starting with a process of bottom-up involvement of representatives of Civil Society (Municipalities, Universities, Chambers of Commerce) through the mechanism of our Round Tables.

- From June 2019, the Chairmanship of the All has been held by the Republic of Serbia which is bringing forward a dynamic and excellent Presidency that intends to continue with fostering good neighbourly relations and regional cooperation in order to accelerate development and growth.
- Particular focus has also been reserved to the topic of connectivity between the coastal areas and the hinterland of our Adriatic-Ionian Macroregion.
- 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 process in Europe.

- I therefore express deep disagreement and disappointment over the failure to agree on opening EU accession talks with Albania and North Macedonia.
- 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.
- Next year the All will turn 20 years old – born with the Italian support through the Ancona Declaration - therefore I invite you to participate to the 20th Anniversary Celebrations, which will take place in Ancona in April 2020, in the week of 20-24.
- The Celebrations will give us an opportunity to exchange views on current affairs and issues of common concerns and to take stock of our achievements

over the past twenty years. It will be a great occasion to raise awareness of common history and values, and reinforcing a sense of belonging to a common European space.

- I am confident we will have a fruitful and constructive discussion, aimed at strengthening the All as a regional forum committed to supporting European integration and sustainable development in the region.
- I wish success to the Republic of Montenegro for the incoming CEI Presidency. We had a great experience working with them during the last All Chairmanship.
- Thank you again to the Italian CEI Presidency for the invitation to this Summit and for the warm hospitality in Rome.