



**Adriatic Ionian Council / EUSAIR Ministerial Meeting**  
**Tirana, 16 May 2022, h.11.00-12.00**

**Statement by H.E. Ambassador Giovanni Castellaneta, Secretary General of the Adriatic and Ionian Initiative**

Distinguished ministers,  
Excellencies,  
Ladies and Gentlemen,

Let me **thank the Albanian Chairmanship** and **Ms. Megi Fino, Deputy Minister for Europe of Foreign Affairs of Albania**, for the kind invitation and for the organization of this successful meeting - the first Adriatic Ionian Council organized, once again, in person after two years of pandemic.

This Adriatic Ionian Council / EUSAIR Ministerial meeting takes place in a crossroad and crucial historical moment, with the war in Ukraine running for more than 80 days.

The **TRIO-Presidency** of the Adriatic and Ionian Initiative issued recently a Joint Statement **condemning** in the strongest terms **the military invasion of Ukraine** from the Russian Federation.

The AII foundations are rooted on the values and standards of European Union and the AII stands today with Ukraine against this illegal act of war against a sovereign and independent state. This violation of the international law threatens the regional, European and global security.

But despite the tragedy of the war, the thousands of deaths, millions of displaced people, and a country severely damaged, we can draw at least two positive conclusions from this situation.

First, the war has finally made it possible to understand the **important role** that the European Union can play in foreign policy.



Second, the Ukraine tragedy made it clear that the “European project” is not complete without Western Balkans and other European countries.

These countries, which belong to Europe for their history, culture, political aspirations and geography, must join the European Union as soon as possible and without hesitation, finally obtaining the **membership**. This would greatly contribute to **strengthening the stability of the entire region**.

**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.

Today's meeting is important to underline and shed light on this urgency, especially under the Albanian Presidency, who has been waiting for too many years to see tangible progresses towards the European Union.

For more than 20 years of its existence, this Initiative has significantly contributed to building trust, intensifying cooperation, integrating and adopting European values and standards.

As Adriatic and Ionian Initiative, we will continue to support the **European integration aspirations of the Western Balkans and supporting candidate and potential candidate countries in their bid for accession in the European Union**.

The **18° Conference of Presidents of All Parliaments** took place a few days ago here in Tirana, on May 5-6, and Presidents and representatives of National Parliaments expressed the importance and urgency of speeding up the enlargement and EU integration process.

The **Parliamentary Dimension** is in fact another fundamental asset for us. A **strict cooperation among Parliaments** gives indeed added value in the effort to upgrade regional cooperation and to make the AII and the EUSAIR



instruments to get the Western Balkans **again at the heart of European policy**.

But the high-political level needs to go along with a **bottom-up approach** involving also the **civil society and the youth**.

Indeed, in addition to the political and parliamentary dimension, the Initiative is based on **cultural and social dimension** that distinguishes it from the EUSAIR Strategy that has a more economic feature.

Civil society organisations allow citizens to take an active part in setting the political agenda. For an aspiring EU member country, a vibrant civil society contributes to fulfilling the conditions for EU membership. It is therefore essential to engage youth and civil society in the EU integration process.

The Adriatic and Ionian civil society and stakeholders - **Chambers of Commerce, Cities and Universities** – have been involved and sponsored, through our Round Tables, in order to put into practice the principle of subsidiarity, essential for each macroregional strategy. I am really glad to see that this has been thoroughly recognized in the Tirana declaration.

Therefore, to create and strengthen a true “European spirit”, I would like also to commend the contribution of the AII as a springboard for cultural and social exchanges, also increasingly involving the younger generations. We want to develop a European network of young people and **reinforce that sense of belonging to a common European space**. This means investing in our future.

As Permanent Secretariat we are going to finance **10 two-year scholarships** which will be 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.

We will also finance, starting from next fall, **50 internships for young citizens coming from AII Participating Countries**, which allows



university students to carry out training periods in companies and institutions of the Adriatic-Ionian Region.

In cooperation with the **Central European Initiative**, we have also developed a project called “IMAGINE” - Active Young Citizens for Sustainable Development in Central European Initiative and Adriatic Ionian Initiative - designed to stimulate the engagement of youth and high schools in the framework of the **United Nations Agenda 2030** and its **17 Sustainable Development Goals**.

I want to thank and congratulate **the Albanian Chairmanship** for the work done during this year and particularly **Mr. Ilir Melo** and his team for having established a friendly, fair and efficient cooperation with the Permanent Secretariat. Albania had the merit to put at the centre of its Chairmanship, two key priorities for the future of our region, youth and the EU integration process.

I am convinced that what is emerging from the **Tirana Declaration** can produce a qualitative step forward and sends a strong message in terms of importance of EU enlargement policy and on the positive outcomes that the youth engagement is producing.

Let me finally wish every success to the **incoming Bosnia-Herzegovina Chairmanship**, which has always demonstrated its firm and enduring commitment to our Initiative. I am sure the next Presidency will be a significant one.

THANK YOU