

**18<sup>th</sup> Conference of the Presidents/Speakers of Parliaments of the Adriatic  
and Ionian Initiative**

**Tirana, 6 May 2022**

**11.00-13.00: I session – “European Integration: Western Balkans, an Added Value of the Adriatic and Ionian Region and of the European Union”**

Honourable President **Lindita Nikolla**,  
Distinguished President **Edi Rama**,  
Distinguished ministers,  
Dear Members of All Parliaments,  
Ladies and Gentlemen,

First let me **thank the Albanian Chairmanship** and Ms. **Lindita Nikolla, Speaker of the Parliament of Albania**, for the kind invitation and for organizing such a successful Conference - the first important event organized in person after a long period of online meetings.

Thank you for the entertainment and for the artistic programme of yesterday night.

Let me also thank the Prime Minister of the Republic of Albania, H.E. **Edi Rama**, and the members of the Albanian Government who are present with us today.

This conference takes place in a particular and crucial historical moment, with the war in Ukraine running for more than 70 days.

The **TRIO-Presidency** of the Adriatic and Ionian Initiative issued a Joint Statement on February 28<sup>th</sup> **condemning** in the strongest terms **the military invasion of Ukraine** from the Russian Federation.

The All foundations are rooted on the values and standards of European Union and the All 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 thousands of deaths and millions of displaced people, we can draw two positive conclusions from this situation.

First, the war at the gates of Europe has seen the awakening of **European consciousness** and 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 there is still 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 Western Balkan countries who have been waiting for too long to join the European family. 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 support for the EU enlargement process remains one of the corner stones of the All mission.

The **Parliamentary Dimension** is 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 All and the EUSAIR instruments to get the Western Balkans **again at the heart of European policy**, where they deserve to be.

All our process is based on a **bottom-up approach**, in line with the subsidiarity principle, involving stakeholders and civil society – Chambers of Commerce, Cities and Universities - through our Round Tables.

In addition to the parliamentary dimension, the Initiative is based on a **political, cultural and social dimension** that distinguishes it from the EUSAIR Strategy and from other institutions that have a more economic feature.

Therefore, to create and strengthen a true “European spirit”, I would like also to commend the contribution of the All 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 and strengthening the solid bond of good friendly relations built over the years.

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 four master's degree courses taught in English at the Marche Polytechnic University. The call will be launched in the coming days and will close at the end of June.

We will also finance, starting from next fall, **50 internships for young citizens coming from All Participating Countries**, which allows university students to carry out training periods in companies and institutions of the Adriatic-Ionian Region.

Additionally, in cooperation with the **Central European Initiative**, we have 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**.

To conclude, I am sure that the next **All/EUSAIR Forum, which will take place in Tirana on May 16-18**, together with the Adriatic and Ionian Council (All highest-level body gathering ten Ministers of Foreign Affairs) will be a great success.

The **Tirana Declaration** is now finalized and the **EU enlargement** will certainly be reflected in the Declaration, as one of the main priorities of the Albanian Chairmanship.

I wish the Albanian Chairmanship every success in the end of its presidency and I look forward to closely cooperate with Bosnia-Herzegovina, the next presiding country of the All, starting from June 1<sup>st</sup> .

I wish you a successful work and I am looking forward to the discussion that will follow.

THANK YOU