

EUSAIR Stakeholders Platform Newsletter – Spring Edition 2020



Dear EUSAIR colleagues,

We invite you to take a look at the main events that have taken place in Adriatic Ionian Region since Spring 2020 and get inspired with the ideas all countries have contributed to.

Yours,

EUSAIR Stakeholders Platform Facility Point Staff

“The EUSAIR Strategy represents an important and precious opportunity for growth and development of our Countries, through a shared and participatory approach to problems solving. Our aim is going beyond regional and national borders, in order to synergize human and financial resources.”

Marche Region President

Luca Ceriscioli

Spotlight

From Ancona Declaration to the EUSAIR: the long journey of the Adriatic-Ionian cooperation

On May 19-20, twenty years ago, the Summit on Development and Security on the Adriatic and Ionian Seas was held in Ancona. It was the first stone on the path that has led to the EU Strategy for the Adriatic-Ionian Region. This newsletter, edited by the journalist Matteo Tacconi*, highlights key passages of

this long experience of regional and European cooperation, mapping future developments as well. Through collecting memories and glimpses, the sense of the Adriatic-Ionian cooperation emerges.

This newsletter is promoted by Marche Region, which since 2000 have been fully committed to the Adriatic-Ionian cooperation, in all of its aspects. Marche Region is the Italian Project Partner of Supporting the governance of the EUSAIR: Facility Point - Axis IV ADRION Programme, activated to enhance the implementation of the EUSAIR. Within this framework, Marche Region has launched the [EUSAIR Stakeholder Platform \(ESP\)](#), an enterprise social network that offers EUSAIR's stakeholders new sharing and cooperative tools, among them the present newsletter.

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PART I

“From a ‘sea wall’ to a bridge. Our mission to recover the historical meaning of the basin”. An interview with Ambassador Fabio Pigliapoco



Twenty years ago, the Heads of State and Government of Italy, Greece, Albania, Slovenia, Bosnia and Herzegovina and Croatia gathered in Ancona for the **Summit on Development and Security on the Adriatic and Ionian Seas**. Promoted by the Italian Government and endorsed by the EU Commission, the high-level regional conference, held on May 19-20, drew a strategy to reignite cohesion in the Adriatic-Ionian basin, a historic-cultural bridge turned into a “sea wall” due to the Cold War and then shattered by the violent disintegration of Yugoslavia.

In Ancona, the Ministers of Foreign Affairs signed a document – the [Ancona Declaration](#) – at the presence of the President of the EU Commission, Romano Prodi. It established the Adriatic and Ionian Initiative (All), prioritizing key areas of cooperation: transports and tourism; sustainable development and protection of the environment; culture, science and education; and fight against illegal activities.

The summit was the first stone on the path that has led to the EU Strategy for the Adriatic-Ionian Region (EUSAIR). «For the first time the idea of restoring the Adriatic-Ionian basin historical identity was outlined and the commitment for integrating the Balkans in the European space emerged clearly. Fundamentals were laid down», says Ambassador Fabio Pigliapoco, All Secretary General from 2011 to 2017.

He attended the Ancona summit as Italy’s Ambassador to Croatia. «The Foreign Minister, Mr. Lamberto Dini, contacted me and other colleagues serving in southeastern Europe to illustrate his idea to organize a conference to foster regional stability, in a city that could be easily recognized as a positive symbol of the Trans-Adriatic and Trans-Ionian legacy». Ancona matched this profile.

Since then, Ambassador Pigliapoco has been constantly committed to the Adriatic-Ionian cooperation. After he left Zagreb, he worked in the Directorate for European Countries at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in 2003-2006. In 2011, after having served as Ambassador to Prague for five years, he was picked as

Secretary General of the AI. Once the mandate expired, he stayed as Senior Advisor to the current Secretary General, Ambassador Giovanni Castellaneta. «So, my career as diplomat and my role at the AI have almost fully coincided in the last twenty years», Pigliapoco says. Given this, we asked him for a glimpse on the long journey of the Adriatic-Ionian cooperation.

A turning point was the creation of the AI Permanent Secretariat in 2007, based in Ancona. «The Adriatic-Ionian Initiative was a very important forum, focused on overcoming tragedies of the past to achieve common goals. Yet, the AI needed a strong political body to coordinate activities better, mediate between different interests and provide a persistent stimulus to deliver results. Therefore, the Permanent Secretariat was created», Pigliapoco tells.

In 2010, there was another major passage. «Under the aegis of the Italian Presidency of the EU Council, we played the macro-regional card, embarking on a new adventure. We had to learn a lot. Somehow, it was like going back to school».

Six years have passed since the EUSAIR has been adopted. The transition from concept to policy action is still a work in progress, but the Strategy is moving forward. **«We are fully engaged in strengthening the so-called *embedding process***, which means aligning EU funding resources toward macro-regional actions. To make this happen, we are pursuing more fluid coordination procedures among partners, with a special attention to the EU long-term budget 2021-2027».

Funding projects is essential, but this should not overshadow the political significance of the Adriatic-Ionian cooperation. First, it means encouraging the Europeanization of the Western Balkans (Serbia, Montenegro, North Macedonia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Albania and Kosovo). «Being in the EUSAIR, Serbia, Montenegro, North Macedonia and Bosnia Herzegovina feel attached to Europe. Furthermore, they learn how EU funding mechanisms work. Once in the club, they will already have a solid know-how», the Ambassador states. Secondly, **the enduring Adriatic-Ionian cooperation has given civil societies the chance to play a crucial role**, through the Forum of Adriatic and Ionian Cities (FAIC), the Forum of the Adriatic and Ionian Chambers of Commerce (AIC Forum) and Uniadriion. «They are the blood of the EUSAIR. Relations between Adriatic-Ionian Cities, Chambers of Commerce and Universities contribute to forge networks in the basin through a bottom-up approach based on the subsidiary principle, which Brussels strongly advocates. Without this, everything would just be bureaucracy», Pigliapoco argues.

PART II

FORA, or the blood of the Strategy

On the eve of the Ancona Summit in 2000, the Forum of Adriatic and Ionian

Cities (FAIC) was set up. After the Summit, in the same 2000 and in 2001 respectively, other two Forums were established: Uniadrion, the Association of Universities of the Adriatic-Ionian Region, and the Forum of the Adriatic and Ionian Chambers of Commerce (AIC Forum). All of these structures are simultaneously committed to involve civil societies in the Adriatic-Ionian cooperation process.

General Secretariats are based in Ancona, while the Presidencies rotate, following the All scheme for Uniadrion, between the founding Chambers (Split and Marche Chambers) for the AIC Forum and according to the Assembly's decision for the FAIC. We contacted Secretaries General, as well as the AIC Forum President, to evaluate the experience made so far and show the way to the future.

Ida Simonella, FAIC Secretary General

In the first years, the FAIC has been instrumental in recreating a common space across our two seas, as well as in the Western Balkans. We should not forget that at that time the legacy of the Cold War and the echoes of the conflicts in the former Yugoslavia were still present.

After this phase, the FAIC has made a clear choice: **working with and for young people**. This is our main mission. Through actions targeting youth, we promote social inclusion in the basin and observe what young people hope, as well as problems they face. Somehow, FAIC works as a "social antenna".

Our initiatives aim at disseminating European values too, aligning with the EUSAIR mission. A.N.I.M.US, the Adriatic-Ionian Youth games, held in Ancona in 2014, 2016 and 2019, is an event that strictly adheres to this goal, I do think. Sport competitions, to which hundreds of young people took part, are a remarkable tool to promote dialogue, friendship and European identity. For sure, there will be more A.N.I.M.US editions in the future.

Below, the final ceremony of the 2019 ANIMUS Edition



Andrea Perna, Uniadrion Secretary General

I was appointed as Secretary General just few months ago, thus I do not have a historic memory. Yet, while getting familiar with the network, I have realized that over these 20 years a big effort has been done to re-energize historical relations that have shaped the macro-regional environment throughout history.

Now, it is time to upgrade ambitions. There is a Strategy, and our network must be one of its engines. How? For example, we could map centers of excellence in the region in order to **set up clusters outlining ideas, solutions and proposals to strengthen the EUSAIR pillars**. Clusters could provide data, reports and papers that policy-makers can use to enhance the strategy.

Incentivizing students and professors exchanges is another step to improve Uniadrion's effectiveness. Furthermore, we look at building ties with universities based outside our basin, for example those in the Baltic Sea or Danube areas, which have a well-tested expertise in cooperation aimed at fostering macro-regional cohesion, since Brussels' Strategies for these macro-regions have been adopted before the EUSAIR. Doing this would mean absorbing best practices, encouraging mutual learning and creating a backbone of universities that converge on the same goal: empowering macro-regions, and cooperation among macro-regions.

Michele De Vita, AIC Forum Secretary General

I have been working as Secretary General since the beginning of this journey, and what I want to emphasize is that this has been a truly genuine process of European cooperation and integration. We have built up a network of Chambers of Commerce and people dedicated to to restore ties in the macro-regional context. It has not been an easy task, considering how the scenario was in 2000, and still it is not so relaxed, but through dialogue, commitment and mediation we have delivered results.

As for single projects that make us feel proud, I would mention the cooperation with Ecapital culture for setting up the **Adriatic Start-Up School**, which supports young people to become entrepreneurs in the creative and cultural fields, and **Adrion – Adriatic and Ionian Lands**, an initiative targeted to create a common tourism brand. In the future, we plan to accord higher priority to B2B meetings, also through the EUSAIR Stakeholder Platform. We were discussing about this, yet the outbreak of the coronavirus pandemic forced us to postpone the implementation.

Gino Sabatini, AIC Forum President

In this weird time, marked by the Covid-19 pandemic, a wide range of problems have abruptly emerged, affecting the Adriatic-Ionian region too. Yet, this is also a window of opportunity. It is a call to stress even more on our historic mission of being a transnational tool going beyond borders and **promoting mutual interests in the Adriatic-Ionian community**, aware of our shared heritage. The common work done so far gives us the chance to join efforts to speed up the recovery. In practical terms, we have the expertise to work jointly, even more, in spheres like blue growth, tourism and infrastructures, agriculture, circular economy and women entrepreneurship, trying to benefit from opportunities offered by digital economy. It is a challenge that we cannot miss.

PART III

The revised EU Strategy for enlargement, explained by the Special Advisor to the EU “Foreign Minister”

Since the breakup of Yugoslavia and the end of the communist regime in Albania, both occurred in 1991, only two Balkan countries, Slovenia and Croatia, have joined the EU. Slovenia achieved EU membership in 2004 and Croatia in 2013. Montenegro and Serbia opened accession talks in 2012 and 2014, while North Macedonia and Albania are supposed to do it by few months, after the EU Council gave green light in March. As for Bosnia Herzegovina and Kosovo, they still lag behind.

Legacy of wars in former Yugoslavia and extreme political-economic crisis in Albania in the Nineties, EU's enlargement fatigue after 2004 and the eruption of the global financial crisis in 2008-2009 are among the reasons behind such a pace of integration, which is rather slow. For Visegrád countries, for example, the journey to Europe took only 15 years. The Berlin Wall fell in 1989; they joined the EU in 2004.

The path to Europe, which finds in the EUSAI a soft but constant stimulus, is still long and full on uncertainties for the Western Balkans. **A key test in the near future will be adapting to the new enlargement strategy launched by the EU Commission** early this year. Previously based on a chapter-by-chapter approach, the mechanism focuses now on the following clusters, which regroups the 35 chapters of the so-called *acquis communautaire*:

- 1) *Fundamentals, including rule of law.*
- (2) *Internal market.*
- (3) *Competitiveness and inclusive growth.*
- (4) *Green agenda and sustainable connectivity.*
- (5) *Resources, agriculture, and cohesion.*
- (6) *External relations.*

If reforms are fulfilled a whole pillar can be opened and remain so during the whole negotiation process. It is not just a technical rearrangement. **The new methodology has an increased political dimension**, with a strong focus on the rule of law. «The change indicates the EU's concern about the trend of democratic backsliding in the Western Balkans», states Nathalie Tocci, Director of the Istituto Affari Internazionali (IAI) and Special Advisor to the EU High Representative for Defense and Foreign Affairs, Josep Borrell.

A number of watchdogs, among them Freedom House in its annual report Nations in Transit, recently issued, have observed deteriorations in terms of judiciary independence, electoral procedures and media freedom throughout the region, especially in Serbia, Albania and Montenegro.

The French President, Emmanuel Macron, pushed for the revision of the enlargement approach. France, backed by Denmark, Austria and The Netherlands, vetoed the opening of accession talks for North Macedonia and Albania in October 2019, arguing that the enlargement strategy had to be restructured before taking this step, eventually done in March. «On the one hand, Macron's veto reflects the French traditional approach to the enlargement, which is very cautious, as well as – as said – a legitimate concern for the current political situation in Europe's southeastern corner. On the other hand, Macron and other EU leaders are worried by the scenario in Poland and Hungary. Controversial reforms made by Budapest and Warsaw in the judicial sphere led to a clash with the EU Commission, so far unsolved. Thus, the idea inspiring the new methodology for enlargement is that reforms carried out by candidate members must be very robust and effective, especially in the field of rule of law, in order to avoid new complicate scenarios once they will join the bloc», says Tocci, contacted by phone.

Will the new enlargement strategy be effective? «Things work only when and if implemented. The Western Balkans leaders must show a genuine will to upgrade the rule of law. At the same time, the EU must give priority to the enlargement. It is a two-way process», Tocci states.

MORE:

[“The Western Balkans are a priority for this Commission”. “Statement by Ursula von der Leyen ahead of the EU-Western Balkans Informal](#)

PART IV

“No country is an island unto itself either”. North Macedonia’s Deputy Prime Minister speaks



The flag raising special ceremony held at NATO HQ in Brussels on March 30 to celebrate North Macedonia's accession.

On 2 April 2020, North Macedonia has become the ninth participating country of the EUSAIR. On the one hand, it confirms the attractiveness of the Strategy. On the other, it indubitably emerges as one of the very valuable consequences of the recent solution of the long-time name dispute between North Macedonia and Greece. To weigh North Macedonia's ambitions and hopes in the EUSAIR, we made an email interview with Mr. Bujar Osmani, North Macedonia's Deputy Prime Minister for European Affairs and national political coordinator for the EUSAIR. Questions and answers follow.

Q: Why did North Macedonia want to join the EUSAIR?

A: Cooperating with neighbouring countries and with those in close geographical and political proximity to us is key to promote social prosperity

and growth. We fully recognize the benefits deriving from regional cooperation, one of the stepping-stones for development, for our region and beyond. I believe that many of you are familiar with the proverb stating that “no man is an island”. I would upgrade this proverb, putting it in the context of regional cooperation and saying without any doubt that “no country is an island unto itself either”. Furthermore, having EU member states in the EUSAIR gives additional meaning to our participation, in terms of contribution to the further integration of the Western Balkans in the European Union. All of this builds a strong case in favour of belonging to the EUSAIR.

Q: Does North Macedonia’s participation to the EUSAIR reflect somehow recent positive developments in bilateral relations with Greece?

A: Our interest for joining the EUSAIR had been already expressed when discussions about the Strategy took off, as well as during the process that led its adoption. Yet, talks about our inclusion were put to a halt for a very long time. Solving the name dispute with Athens certainly helped in paving the way for presenting our candidature for the EUSAIR again. It influenced positively other integrative processes as well, which are crucial for the country, like NATO full membership, a goal achieved in March, and the opening of EU accession talks, to which the EU Council gave green light, again in March. By solving such a big foreign policy problem, weighing down on us since the independence, we have set an example for the region on how to build good neighbouring policy and overcoming open issues through compromises, talks and a positive approach. This is something to highlight, and I would use this opportunity to reiterate its importance.

Q: How will North Macedonia, a country lacking access to sea, contribute to the EUSAIR?

A: The EUSAIR goes beyond maritime cooperation. It also deal with land connections, energy networks, environment protection, tourism development and diversification, as well as on culture. It offers a wide range of opportunities for each participating country, whether they are maritime or landlocked countries, as in our case. The EUSAIR is a chance to get closer to a regional common denominator, working together on areas where shared interests emerge for the benefit of each country and the region as whole.

Beside this, if we approach the EUSAIR from the perspective of European integration, I can clearly see synergies between the Strategy and accession talks. Negotiations with Brussels will add value to the political profile of the EUSAIR. And again, I see our participation in the EUSAIR as fuel for enhancing regional cooperation in the Western Balkans, which is a very important condition ahead of forthcoming negotiations with the EU.

PART V

EUSAIR Stakeholders Platform Activities



The Cities and the Future of European Territorial Cooperation: examples of Cooperation and Synergies from the Adriatic-Ionian and Atlantic Regions

On 23 January 2020 in Bologna was held the Roundtable on ETC Best Practices entitled **"The Cities and the Future of European Territorial Cooperation: examples of Cooperation and Synergies from the Adriatic-Ionian and Atlantic Regions"**.

The event, organized by Marche Region, in collaboration with Marche Chamber of Commerce and the three Adriatic Ionian Fora, was held at ADRION JS. At the Roundtable took part important associations of local authorities, universities, chambers of commerce of the Adriatic and Ionian area and of the Atlantic area. The event was an occasion to discuss about the good practices related to the involvement of cities and the public stakeholders in the initiatives linked to European Territorial Cooperation.

During the event the Marche Region presented the EUSAIR Stakeholders Platform.



Promotion and dissemination of the EUSAIR Stakeholders Platform

Within the **“Facility Point – Supporting the governance of the EUSAIR” project**, on March 4th at the Marche Region in Ancona was held the technical meeting addressed to the new Marche Region Stakeholders Platform Staff.

The event, promoted and organized by Marche Region, was the occasion to promote the EUSAIR Strategy and “Facility Point” project. In particular, referent for the EU Strategy for the Adriatic Ionian Region – Marche Region, Donatella Romozzi underlined the importance of the Stakeholders Platform, which aims at bringing together, mobilizing and engaging all relevant stakeholders in order to broaden the sense of ownership of EUSAIR and its Action Plan.

At the event took part the Amb. Fabio Pigliapoco – Senior Advisor of the Permanent Secretariat of the Adriatic and Ionian Initiative, Silvano Bertini – Head of the Productive Activities, Labour and Education Department and Giovanni Lucarelli – Executive Director of the procurement establishing ESP.

EUSAIR Stakeholders Platform Marche Region

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