

ESP Newsletter – Winter 2021



Dear EUSAIR colleagues,

We invite you to take a look at the main events that have taken place in Adriatic Ionian region since Winter 2021 and get inspired with the ideas all countries have contributed to.

Yours,

ESP Facility Point partnership

A Boost For Connectivity: A Tale of the Mid-December ESP Webinars

Despite the pandemic, [EUSAIR](#) stakeholders keep meeting to address challenges and perspectives in the Adriatic-Ionian Region. On 15-17 December, hundreds of them participated to three online webinars promoted by the Facility Point on the [EUSAIR Stakeholders Platform](#) (ESP). Set up by Marche Region, the Italian project partner of the Facility Point, it functions as an enterprise social network providing stakeholders new sharing and cooperative tools. During the last months, marked by restrictions on travels imposed to contain the pandemic, stakeholders have increasingly met virtually on ESP.

The webinars held in mid-December were organized in collaboration with the Forum of Adriatic and Ionian Cities (FAIC), the Forum of the Adriatic and Ionian Chambers of Commerce (AIC) and UniAdriion and were focused on the EUSAIR Strategy for Infrastructures, the state of the art of ADRIONCycleTour and digital innovation in pandemic-time.



The EUSAIR Strategy for Infrastructures

Marche Region's President Opening Remarks

In his opening remarks, Francesco Acquaroli, the recently elected Marche Region's President, welcomed the stakeholders – both private and public – and stressed that his cabinet will continue being strongly committed to the Adriatic-Ionian cooperation, a process in which Marche Region has been involved since the beginning. He recalled how everything began, in 2000, more than twenty years ago, when Foreign Ministers of some of the current participant countries of the Strategy met in Ancona to sign a declaration establishing the Adriatic-Ionian Initiative ([We wrote about that breakthrough summit in the Spring Edition of our newsletter](#)).

Then, Mr. Acquaroli explained that the mid-December events were launched to upgrade discussions over connectivity, a crucial aspect in the making of the Strategy, unfolding a wide range of processes. Ending his opening remarks, the Marche Region President underscored that integration and cohesion must inspire the Strategy also in the future, in accordance to guidelines emerged in the first EUSAIR governing board. "Integration and cohesion are the key words in the challenge we undertook in the EUSAIR first governing board in January 2015", he recalled.

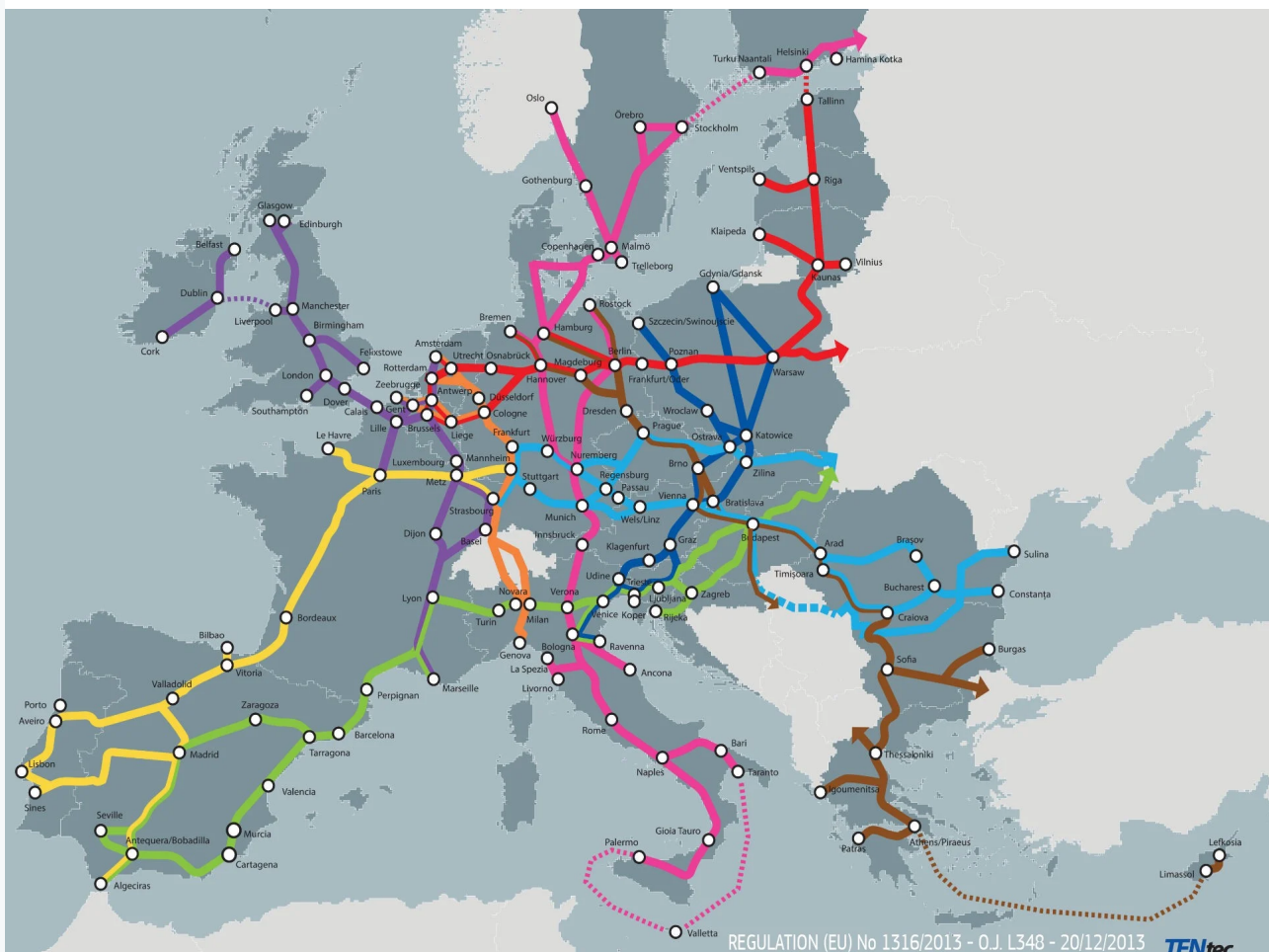
Motorways, railways, seaways.

The geopolitical game in the Adriatic-Ionian Region

The first webinar, whose title was "The Adriatic-Ionian Region and the Western Balkans at the Heart of World Geo-politics: Role of the Global Powers and of the European Union", highlighted the geopolitical relevance that the region, a crossroad of multiple economic and political interests, has re-gained in recent times. China, Russia, the U.S. and the EU struggle to expand their influence in this strategic area, connecting East and West. Investing in infrastructures, namely building new railways and motorways, gain leverage, especially in the Western Balkans, which badly need to modernize their infrastructural networks.

The EU is by large the main trading partner and the main investor in the Western Balkans, but due to sweeping geopolitical competition, it has to reaffirm its ties with its southeastern neighbors, also in terms of economic support. Panelists were asked to formulate ideas on how to face this challenge.

Professor Pierluigi Coppola, one of the coordinators of the Pillar 2 of the EUSAIR (Connecting the Region), told that the Strategy is developing a Transport Masterplan for the Region (railways, roads and maritime connections). The aim is supporting the European Commission in defining priority projects to develop and complete the Trans-European Transport Network (TEN-T), a wide network of transports enhancing economic and territorial cohesion in the EU. Coppola pointed out that maritime routes, intermodal nodes and digitalization to simplify border-crossing procedures and improve safety, together with transport de-carbonization, are the main priorities to embed EUSAIR projects into the EU funding schemes in 2021-2027. "Today, transports have the potential of unlocking social and economic opportunities, given their strategic role and the so much-needed response to the climatic crisis we are going through", Coppola stated.



The map of the Trans-European Transport Network (TEN-T)

Source: European Commission

Discussants' remarks

- "The Northern Adriatic Region is becoming more and more strategic also due to China's acquisition of the Port of Piraeus, which opens new business opportunities. Now it's time for Europe to seize them"

Zeno D'Agostino

President of the Port Network Authority of the Eastern Adriatic Sea

- “Seaways can become an element of sustainability, moving traffics from motorways to seaways. Inter-modality, technological innovation and sustainability are crucial for growth”

Rodolfo Giampieri

President of Port System Authority of the Central Adriatic Sea

- “Special free economic zones (ZES) open up new, interesting perspectives. We need to address them”

Natale Mazzucca

Deputy President of Confindustria, Head of the Blue Economy Department

- “Infrastructures and transports have been an essential tool for creating natural connections between Adriatic and Ionian countries, even before the establishment of the Adriatic-Ionian Region”

Ida Simonella

Secretary General of Forum of Adriatic and Ionian Cities

- “There could be opportunities to be caught with the reshoring of manufacturing from the Far East to the Adriatic-Ionic Region and the Balkans”

Cesare Bernabei

EU DG Regio

- “The European Union must play its cards and improve railway and terrestrial connections”

Marco Spinedi

President of the Bologna Freight Village

- “There will soon be the possibility of increasing the movement of people across the region opening air routes connecting Italian airport to Skopje, Pristina and Sarajevo”.

Carmine Bassetti

CEO of Aerdorica, Airport of Falconara

- “We must invest in exchanges between young graduates from the two sides of the basin. It can stunningly contribute to the growth of our region”.

Gino Sabatini

President of Marche Chamber of Commerce

ADRIONCycleTour, for a Sustainable Rediscovery of the Region's Treasures

The webinar held on December 16 addressed the potentialities of ADRIONCycleTour, an Adriatic-Ionic cycling route spanning from Italy to Greece,

thus crossing the whole macro-region. "It is a value-added project, since it embraces three EUSAIR priorities, namely sustainable tourism, green mobility and biodiversity protection. What's more, its environmental dimension fully matches the sense of the EU Green Deal, an ambitious roadmap to carbon neutrality in Europe, set up the Commission", Giuseppe Di Paola, from EU DG Regio, stressed during the webinar.

"For the first time, panelists from all the EUSAIR countries, representing both public administrations and civic associations, gather together to give momentum to the project, to make sure that the steps required to secure the European resources needed to fund it are made available, using ESIF, IPA and ETC funds", highlighted professor Coppola in his presentation.

Some parts of the cycling path already exist; some others have just been drawn. Here's the map of the route.

ADRIONCYCLETOUR

a common and joint Cycleways System in the Adriatic-Ionian Region



"Innovation Will Mark the Post-Covid Era", Professor Frontoni Says

The health and economic impact of the coronavirus, a global asymmetric

shock, is unprecedented. It caused two million deaths worldwide, pushing health systems on the verge of collapse. It forced governments to implement lockdowns, with severe consequences on economic activities and labor market.

Yet, like other upheavals in human history, the current pandemic crisis unfolds opportunities, too. Namely, it can act as the decisive accelerator for innovation and digitalization, which not only are the crucial elements for the recovery, but “will shape the new normalcy into which the pandemic has ragged us”, says Emanuele Frontoni, Professor of Computer Vision & Deep Learning at Ancona University (Università Politecnica delle Marche).

He was the chairman of the third webinar promoted in December by the ESP, which rightly assessed ways to adapt to the post-Covid era, as the title of the session – *Connectivity and Covid-19: the Crisis as a Factor of Digital Transformation and Innovative Accelerator* – clearly indicates. We reached Frontoni by phone to get hints emerged during the session.

Professor Frontoni, how the pandemic is transforming our region?

In the post-COVID-19 landscape, digitalization and sectorial transformations will deeply change the demand for skills, accelerate labour market transition and require robust social protection mechanisms for wider categories of people. The EUSAIR, like all the other regions in the world, faces a wide number of challenges. It must upgrade digital infrastructures to deliver online services, programs for job training and to build up competences in the education sphere, just to mention some of the more critical topics. To achieve better results, our macro-region must strengthen the resilience of people and companies, education and employment systems, exploring solutions for a fair and inclusive recovery.

Are there already companies or public administrations, in our macro-region, that are anticipating this “new normalcy”

Sure. The webinar highlighted some success stories, among them [Remember](#), a project run by a bunch of Central Adriatic Port Authorities to create a digital database of cultural heritage assets in port cities. It shapes a brand, but also promote a goal, which is strengthening tourism. Well, the pandemic freezes it, but in the meantime, museums and cultural areas can be explored online.

Another worthy project, called [Step-Up](#), enables tourists, through a mobile app, to find a wide range of intermodal transnational travel solutions between Italy and Croatia: planes, ferries, trains, even cycling paths. Implemented by Pluservice, a company based in Senigallia, Marche Region, the project involves six partners: Marche and Emilia-Romagna Regions, the Municipality of Lecce, the University of Trieste, the Split-Dalmatia County, the City of Šibenik and the Airport of Zadar.

The key for the future lies in fostering transnational projects in our basin, it seems.

This is unavoidable, but many more subjects, not only experts, must be involved in the cooperative process. Companies and universities must work harder to foster wider networks. Furthermore, a better balance between top-down and bottom-up approaches must be found. So far, top-down policies have prevailed.

However, cross-border cooperation between regions of the basin can't work alone. The EUSAIR has to build ties to Digital Europe, a robust package of initiatives outlined by the EU to support digital transformation for companies,

public administration and citizens. To get a digital revolution, reshaping and improving blue and green economy, tourism and wellbeing, efforts of the EUSAIR countries and regions, as well as the universities of the basin, must be coupled with those of the EU. The sea is not the limit.

ESP Marche Region

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