

## **1<sup>ST</sup> FORUM OF THE EU MACRO-REGIONAL STRATEGY FOR THE ADRIATIC AND IONIAN REGION HELD ON 12-13 MAY 2016 IN DUBROVNIK (CROATIA)**

On 12 and 13 May 2016, in Dubrovnik, more than 600 participants attended the 1<sup>st</sup> Forum of the EU Strategy for the Adriatic and Ionian Region (EUSAIR), jointly organised by the European Commission and the Government of Croatia.

One year and a half after the launch of this EU macro-regional strategy, the Forum gathered together the representatives of the national, regional and local administrations of the eight participating countries (Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Greece, Italy, Montenegro, Serbia, Slovenia) as well as a wide range of stakeholders (academia, business sector, civil society) to discuss the progress so far and define the way forward.

Back-to-back with the event, the Croatian Minister of Foreign Affairs, Miro Kovač, hosted a meeting of the Foreign Affairs ministers and the ministers responsible for EU funds, with the participation of Commissioner for Regional Policy Corina Crețu. The [Dubrovnik Declaration](#) adopted at the meeting calls for solidarity with the communities hit by the refugee and migrant crisis, advocates exploring avenues of action that the Strategy could undertake in this regard and invites the Interreg Adriatic Programme to come out with concrete proposals. Regarding the Strategy's implementation, the Declaration re-confirms the commitment of the ministers to devote financial, administrative and technical resources and promote a cross-sectoral cooperation between the countries and across the different levels of government. In order to make it operational, it also calls for a better alignment of the Strategy with the national priorities for funding.

In the Forum' Opening speech, Commissioner Crețu stressed that joint work allows the countries in the region to tackle challenges and seize opportunities which they fail to do alone. To succeed, countries have to, first, think across borders, hence go beyond their comfort zone; second, make sure all relevant partners are around the table; and, third, translate political will into adequate resources.

The refugees and migrants crisis featured high on the agenda of the panel discussion between the ministerial representatives, and was also tackled in Plenary I "For a resilient and innovative Adriatic and Ionian Region – tackling the social and economic challenges" as one of the external shocks that the region is facing.

Keynote speeches of Jack Jacometti (contributor of the European Commission's Joint Research Centre) and Patrizio Bianchi (Regional Minister of Emilia-Romagna Region in Italy) set the scene for this Plenary. The framework of the EUSAIR was confirmed as having a great potential to act as a region wide platform to stimulate collaborative action. A concrete proposal was put forward to develop a coordination mechanism regarding migration policies in the region.

A second plenary session "Unlocking the potential of the Adriatic and Ionian Region – the added value of multi-level governance" was devoted to discussing and analysing the challenges linked to good and multi-level governance. After an introduction by Joaquim Oliveira Martins (OECD), on the different dimensions of multi-level governance, a keynote speech was delivered in the form of a video-message by Ivan Jakovčić, Member of the European Parliament. A discussion followed afterwards on the important role to play by sub-

national administrations in the Strategy's implementation. Good practices were highlighted, in particular by Slovenia as a country participating in three macro-regional strategies.

Three parallel sessions offered a platform for exchange and discussion about crucial issues connected to the four pillars of the Strategy: 1) Blue Growth, 2) Connecting the Region, 3) Environmental Quality and 4) Sustainable Tourism. Existing frameworks and funding opportunities were analysed as a starting point. Several project ideas and proposals of actions to be implemented in the EUSAIR framework were put on the table, having in mind the need to improve the governance capacity as well as the need to involve regional and local authorities, the private sector and non-profit organisations.

A Business-to-Business (B2B) session organised on the margins of the Forum by the Enterprise Europe Network (EEN) brought together more than 100 participants from SMEs, universities, chambers of commerce and other stakeholders, providing the opportunity for exchanges in order to find partners for projects and/or explore new business opportunities.

The Forum confirmed the potential of the Strategy, not only for increased competitiveness and connectivity in the region, but also for supporting the path to EU integration of the four participating candidate and potential candidate countries.

On 1 June 2016 the chairmanship of the EUSAIR will be handed over to Greece. Speaking in the Forum's closing session, Deputy Minister for Economy Alexis Charitsis said that Greek chairmanship will be guided by the leitmotiv "think macro-regionally, act locally".

In his closing remarks, DG REGIO's Director-General Walter Deffaa expressed the need to move from words to action, which requires ensuring continuous commitment beyond political statements. Recalling what Commissioner Crețu, had said during her opening speech, he mentioned the obligation to think out of the box in order to be able to tackle the complex challenges and also seize the opportunities for growth and prosperity in the region.

**A more detailed report and a video will be available in the coming weeks.**