



## ***The role of the EU Strategy for the Adriatic and Ionian Region (EUSAIR) in increasing prosperity and security in Europe***

Declaration of the EPP Group in the European Committee of the Regions

Dubrovnik, 28 October 2016

---

We, the members of the European People's Party Group in the European Committee of the Regions,

1. Support the concept of macro-regional strategies as integrated frameworks between Member States of the European Union and third countries addressing common challenges and providing solutions through strengthened partnership, coordination and connectivity for economic, social and territorial cohesion. We believe that the macro-regional strategy for the Adriatic and Ionian Region (EUSAIR) will complement other EU actions/initiatives in the region and bring a real added value to the projects being implemented in this region, stimulating its growth and security.
2. Encourage therefore the exchange of best practices between partners to foster good governance, decentralisation and regional self-governance in the Adriatic and Ionian macro-region. We encourage all partners to draw on the experience gained to strengthen cooperation with other EU macro-regional strategies, such as those in the Baltic Sea, Danube Basin and Alpine macro-regions.
3. Stress that European, national, regional and local levels of government need to have a say in the design and implementation of the EUSAIR. We commit to providing our expertise together with strong political leadership in order to make full use of the potential of the EUSAIR as a framework for cooperation. Furthermore, we point out that local and regional authorities (LRAs) play an important role in the promotion of democratic values, greater regional cooperation and decentralisation policies in the Adriatic-Ionian area.
4. Underline that the goals of the strategy can only be achieved by properly applying the philosophy of a bottom-up, multilevel governance approach and subsidiarity - engaging all levels of governance to work in partnership. We insist on the need to better include LRAs in the political, operational, technical and implementing management bodies of the strategy while maintaining the European Commission's role in the coordination process.

5. Welcome the scope and the content of the four existing pillars of the EUSAIR (blue growth, connecting the region, environmental quality and sustainable tourism). We encourage the inclusion of other important pillars that could create development benefits for the people of the Adriatic-Ionian area, for example related to security. We emphasise that communication and awareness-raising across all pillars are essential for the participation of LRAs and other partners in the decision-making process as well as to increase public ownership.
6. Strongly support the use of financial and technical resources from the European Structural and Investment Funds (ESIF), the Instrument for Pre-accession Assistance (IPA) and other relevant EU programmes and funds as required by the legal framework of the EU. To this end, we urge closer alignment of national or regional development strategies, via the Partnership Agreements (PAs), Operational Programmes (OPs), IPA strategy papers and other instruments, with the objectives of the EUSAIR. Furthermore, we insist on the need to fundamentally simplify the overall delivering system of EU funds for managing authorities and beneficiaries.
7. Recall the major impact of the global economic crisis on the region and the subsequent fall in public and private investments in the area. We underline the need for a stronger focus on targeted investment initiatives based on local needs that can stimulate economic growth and job creation. In this respect, we encourage the pooling of funds such as the ESIF, IPA and European Fund for Strategic Investments (EFSI) and greater contributions from supranational, national, regional and local sources, together with public-private partnerships. Furthermore, we highlight the need to strengthen the capacity of LRAs to use the financial tools provided by the Western Balkans Investment Framework (WBIF) and the European Investment Bank (EIB) in delivering investments for the fulfilment of the strategy's goals.
8. Point out that cross-border cooperation (CBC) is a key tool in the development of border areas. In this regard, we ask for the Interreg Programme, the European Grouping of Territorial Cooperation (EGTC), the Connecting Europe Facility (CEF) and the EFSI to play a more prominent role in promoting cross-border, transnational and interregional cooperation and in developing cross-border strategies in the Adriatic-Ionian macro-region, as this will support the territorial dimension of the strategy. We underline the need to remove obstacles to cross-border and transnational cooperation and look forward to the results of the European Commission's cross-border review in early 2017.
9. We support the extension of the current TEN-T network through the completion of the Baltic-Adriatic corridor, including the extension of the entire Ionian-Adriatic coast up to Brindisi, on the one hand, and up to southern Greece, on the other. We support the European Parliament's invitation to the participating countries to focus their efforts on the implementation of projects that are covered by the TEN-T network and other current interventions to extend the TEN-T network towards the South-East Europe/Eastern Adriatic coast, and which have the potential to close the existing infrastructure gap in the Adriatic-Ionian area, for example the highway on the Adriatic-Ionian east coast, the high-speed rail on the Italian-Adriatic coast and other projects for strengthening road, oversea and air connections between east and west.
10. Commit to the EUSAIR as a tool of European integration based on the principles of stability, reconciliation and good neighbourly relations among four EU Member States (Croatia, Greece, Italy and Slovenia) and four EU candidate and potential candidate countries (Serbia, Montenegro,

Albania and Bosnia and Herzegovina). We are convinced that the strategy represents a new form of regional cooperation which can contribute to furthering EU integration of the Western Balkans by offering countries the chance to work alongside neighbours on areas of common interest. We also consider it necessary to further involve countries which are not yet included in the strategy, in particular FYROM and Kosovo, but are geographically and economically interlinked with the macro-region, enabling them to participate at least on an individual and project-specific basis.

11. Call for measures to strengthen cooperation and develop common strategies between countries, their partners and regional and local authorities with regard to security, combating terrorism, civil protection and migratory challenges. To this end, we expect that the EUSAIR priorities will be redefined, requiring actions and projects to be adapted to these new emerging needs.

---