

THE ADRIATIC-IONIAN INITIATIVE (AII)

1. About the Adriatic-Ionian Initiative.

The political and ideological crisis following the dismantling of Berlin Wall, the chaotic situation and the inherent instability due to the fragmentation of former Yugoslavia, the anarchical transition towards the free market economy, with the parallel reinvigoration of the well-rooted hidden hatred among the various ethnic, religious and cultural groups, have produced the well-known troubled and extremely dangerous situation of the Balkan area. The whole area was affected by a series of ruinous and uncontrollable wars and was strained by pressures of migratory fluxes, as well as by an unbounded increase of crime.

In the attempt of coping with the spreading of the Balkan crisis, and also to correct some wrong actions, the European Union has promoted the so-called “Stability Pact for South Eastern Europe” regarding all the south-eastern European countries, aspiring to join the Union in the future.

Within this treaty, on the occasion of the Finnish EU Summit of October 1999, held in Tampere, the “Adriatic-Ionian Initiative” has been presented by the Italian Government, before being adopted.

The European Union has strongly encouraged this Italian initiative, made possible by the decisive and active support of another member state of EU, Greece.

The "Adriatic-Ionian Initiative" is based on the idea that international crises are not resolved through violence but through a mutual cooperation among the various peoples, in order to identify and jointly define a range of common interests, in all sectors. These interests are coincident with: security, economics, trade, scientific and technological research and development, environment conservation, and, finally, preservation of cultural heritage and values, which are plentiful in this region.

The Adriatic and Ionian Initiative (AII) was established at the Summit on Development and Security on the Adriatic and Ionian Seas, held in Ancona (Italy) on 19th/20th May 2000 and attended by the Heads of States and Governments of Italy, Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Greece and Slovenia. At the end of the Conference, the Foreign Ministers of the participating Countries signed the “Ancona Declaration” in the presence of the European Commission. As the Declaration states, strengthening regional cooperation helps to promote political and economic stability, thus creating a solid base for the process of European integration. Ancona declaration still represents the basic point of reference of the AII.

The Initiative was later extended to the federative union of Serbia and Montenegro, and after the referendum in Montenegro both States remained AII Participating Countries.

Today, the AII counts eight Members: Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Greece, Italy, Montenegro, Serbia and Slovenia.

1.1. The structure.

The Initiative's decision-making body is the Council of Foreign Ministers (Adriatic-Ionian Council). The Council's agenda is prepared by periodic meetings of Senior Officials, at least three per year. The Chairmanship rotates every May/June according to an alphabetical criterion. The current Greek AII Presidency will conclude its activities at the end of May 2009, when Italy will take it over.

A Permanent Secretariat was inaugurated in Ancona the 19th of June 2008 in order to strengthen the cooperation among the states and to make the initiative more "project oriented".

The Adriatic and Ionian Initiative is connected with several regional organizations in SEE, namely the Central European Initiative (CEI), the Regional Co-operation Council (RCC), and the South East European Cooperation Process (SEECP). the Black Sea Economic Cooperation (BSEC), the Danube Co-operation Process (DCP).

1.2. Fields of activity.

The AII operates in several fields of action, currently divided into four Round Tables:

1. Small and medium sized enterprises
2. Transport and maritime cooperation
3. Tourism, culture and inter-university cooperation (UNIADRION Project is one of its greatest successes).
4. Environment and protection against fire

2. Objectives.

The AII was originally founded with the aim of providing common and concerted solutions to shared problems, from fighting against organised criminality to the need to protect the natural environment of the Adriatic-Ionian Sea.

Eight years after the establishment of the Adriatic-Ionian Initiative the geopolitical environment around has deeply changed. Particularly, among the AII Participating Countries, Slovenia entered the EU in 2004 while the other Adriatic-Ionian East side coastal Countries (Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina,, Montenegro and Serbia), even if with different timeframes and conditions, are gradually approaching the EU within the Stabilization and Association Process framework, as a prelude to a future EU membership. Croatia is a candidate State since 2005. Notwithstanding these changes, the reasons which had grounded the establishment of AII still persist, and they have even become stronger across time.

Given the increased interdependence among States connected to the globalisation processes and the need to provide common solution to common problems affecting

the Adriatic region ask for concerted cooperation not only among regional Countries but also among regional initiatives. Therefore, the cooperation has progressively assumed different forms, including also the establishment of local partnerships among local actors. The last Council in Zagreb (27 May 2008) stated the “determination to improve cooperation among the local and regional level of authorities within the AII”.

2.1. The establishment of a Permanent Secretariat.

The will of strengthening cooperation within the AII asked for the creation of a Permanent Secretariat, provided with staff and charged with promoting, selecting and coordinating the implementation of project activities.

Therefore, taking into account the Sarajevo Declaration of 1st June 2007, the AII Participating States of the Adriatic and Ionian Initiative, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Croatia, Albania, Greece, Italy, Montenegro, Serbia and Slovenia, have agreed upon to set up the Adriatic and Ionian Initiative Permanent Secretariat (AII-PS) located in Ancona, Region Marche (CSO in Zagreb 12th November 2007).

Under the direction of the new Secretary General appointed by the AIC in Zagreb, 27 May 2008, the AII Permanent Secretariat has been established in Ancona. The official inauguration ceremony had place on June 2008. The task of the AII-PS is to grant coordination among Participating States in the framework of the AII activities and to provide any possible support to them, as well as to assist Participants and local authorities in implementing projects.

The AII-PS, given its primary focus on coordinating the AII activities and providing for any relevant official documentation, shall fulfil all the tasks assigned by the AII Council, AII Chairmanship in Office and the Committee of AII Senior Officials.

The main task absolved by the AII-PS in this year of activity has been to coordinate the regional Fora already existing in Ancona: Forum of the Adriatic & Ionian Chamber of Commerce, Forum of the Adriatic & Ionian Cities and Towns, UniAdriion. Through plenary, technical meetings it was assured a better cooperation between these Fora and the Secretariat with the aim, i.a., to guarantee an active participation to the different meetings (Round Tables) of the Initiative. The Permanent Secretariat is committed in changing the AII in a project oriented initiative. During the first year of activity particular relevance was given to projects related to Regional Tourism.