



Statement by the First Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs Ivica Dačić at the Adriatic-Ionian Council Meeting and the European Union Council of Ministers Meeting on the European Union Strategy for the Adriatic-Ionian Region:

Excellences, distinguished colleagues,  
Dear guests,  
Ladies and gentlemen,

Allow me, first of all, to say that I am pleased to be taking part in the 4th Annual Forum of the EU Strategy for the Adriatic and Ionian Region (EUSAIR), and to thank our hosts for the excellent arrangements made for this event, as well as for all other meetings held during the course of the past year. Also, I would like to wish a warm welcome to representatives of North Macedonia, a country which has become the ninth member of the Adriatic and Ionian Initiative. The Republic of Serbia stands ready to offer any available support and assistance where needed, hoping that the procedure to integrate North Macedonia in EUSAIR will be expedited in this way. Furthermore, I warmly welcome the attending representatives of the Republic of San Marino which is to become the tenth participating country of the Adriatic and Ionian Initiative.

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May I take this opportunity to underline the excellent cooperation we have had with all states of the Adriatic and Ionian Region, and in particular our partners from the Italian Republic with whom we share the responsibilities of coordinating the second pillar of EUSAIR, entitled "Connecting the Region". I also need to emphasize the efforts being actively undertaken by the Republic of Serbia to strengthen the cooperation with other EUSAIR pillars, namely those dealing with Sustainable tourism, Blue growth and Environmental quality, aiming to support the partner participating countries in the implementation of the set goals.

Dear colleagues,

As you know, EU accession remains the key foreign policy priority of the Republic of Serbia, and in this regard I need to emphasize the reform processes pursued by the Republic of Serbia in various segments of society, aiming to fully affirm this goal. Moreover, a clear EU

membership perspective has been and remains the main motivating factor for a number of reforms and positive development in the region. To the Republic of Serbia, the enlargement policy is one of the Union's vital instruments, not only for stabilizing the region and facilitating economic prosperity, but also for achieving stability and security of the Union as a whole. Therefore, EU enlargement to the Western Balkans region is not only the interest of EU candidate countries and potential candidates, but also the interest of the EU itself and its Member States. In this context, I need to underline the unique character of EUSAIR as compared to other EU macro-regional strategies, reflected in the participation of a large number of states that are yet to join the EU, which is why the Strategy itself and participation in its framework represent an added impetus to the integration process.

Regional cooperation, too, remains a foreign policy priority of the Republic of Serbia, but it needs to be pointed out that participation of everyone is a prerequisite for the full fruition of the cooperation in the region, as well the delivery on the commitments made in this process. In other words, regional cooperation is not a one-way street - and it calls for the engagement of all parties concerned. In contributing to the strengthening of regional cooperation, the Republic of Serbia pays particular attention to the activities in the framework of the Berlin Process, but equally so to the important activities of other regional initiatives. Serbia supports the implementation of jointly agreed regional projects, particularly the infrastructure projects, the investment in youth cooperation, as well as potential new joint projects to be agreed in other fields, contributing to an improved quality of life in the region even prior to formally joining the EU.

Ladies and gentlemen,

We see EUSAIR as a framework for a closer, deepened practical cooperation with other countries of the region, both EU Member States and those aspiring to EU membership, as well as for forging ties in terms of infrastructure, industry and culture while seeking synergy in pursuit of activities of common interest. The latest Report on the implementation of EU macro-regional strategies released by the European Commission in January 2019 has rightly pinpointed the challenges facing macro-regional strategies, and identified the added value they provide. Furthermore, the European Commission echoed the views of the Council of the EU and the European Parliament concerning macro-regional strategies as a distinctive integrative mechanism for facing common challenges, and also a mechanism relevant to the optimal use of valuable EU financial resources. In this regard, we welcome in particular the efforts made by the participating countries to integrate priorities and projects of macro-regional relevance into the EU instruments which will regulate the European Structural and Investment Funds and Instrument for Pre-accession Assistance (IPA) in the next financial framework. The Report also recognized the significant efforts put in by the Republic of Serbia to further build its institutional capacities, for which purpose it has made full use of all available opportunities to cooperate as closely as possible with the EU and its Member States, with the ultimate goal of accelerating the European integration process. Deepening the cooperation within EUSAIR is of huge importance to us due to the exchange of experiences concerning the modus operandi of EU institutions through direct cooperation and recognition of shared interests with the EU Member States from the Adriatic and Ionian region.

I am pleased to inform you that the representatives of the Republic of Serbia have taken seriously the preparations for assuming the Chairmanship of the Adriatic and Ionian Initiative and the Presidency of the EU Strategy for the Adriatic and Ionian Region, in order to be able to define as early as possible the key priorities and the calendar of events. Taking into account that the Republic of Serbia is still the only one of 8 EUSAIR participating countries which has no direct access to the sea, the focus of our Presidency will be on the importance of a functional and synergetic connectivity between the coastal areas and the continental hinterland of the Adriatic and Ionian region. The Republic of Serbia will, naturally, devote efforts to continue the priority activities launched during the preceding Chairmanships.

Ladies and gentlemen,

I wish once again to thank our colleagues from Montenegro for the organisation of this event and for an excellent organization of the Chairmanship of the Adriatic and Ionian Initiative and EUSAIR Presidency. As we develop the concept of our incoming Chairmanship, I hereby affirm the readiness of the Republic of Serbia to continue to deepen the cooperation in the Adriatic and Ionian Region, while drawing on the experiences of the previous Chairs and cooperating with the next Chair, availing ourselves of the assistance and expertise of the All Permanent Secretariat in Ancona.

Thank you!

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