



First Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Serbia Ivica Dacic participated today in a video conference of the Adriatic and Ionian Council and the Ministerial Meeting of the EU Strategy for the Adriatic and Ionian Region (EUSAIR).

The one-year Serbian term as Chair of the Adriatic and Ionian Initiative and EU Strategy for the Adriatic and Ionian Region ended with today's conference, co-chaired by Minister Dacic and Minister of European Integration Jadranka Joksimovic.

Minister Dacic expressed regret that the Serbian Chairmanship, due to the coronavirus pandemic, did not end with the 5th Annual Forum in Belgrade where everyone could have experienced the traditional Serbian hospitality, in addition to working together.

The Minister of Foreign Affairs presented Serbia's results during its one-year term as Chair. The activities carried out were outlined in Priorities and Calendar of Events of the Serbian Chairmanship of the Adriatic and Ionian Initiative and EUSAIR, adopted by the Serbian Government.

In his address, the Minister reiterated Serbia's commitment to the values of the Adriatic and Ionian Initiative and the corresponding Strategy.

"I would like to reiterate Serbia's commitment to the values of the Adriatic and Ionian Initiative and its corresponding Strategy, as a framework within which we conduct activities that strengthen the European path of the countries like mine - which are not yet full-fledged EU Member States - all the while creating an even better place to live in its participating EU Member States".

The Minister expressed Serbia's aim to continue deepening cooperation within the Adriatic and Ionian region, emphasizing that, during its chairmanship, it relied on the experience of previous chairs, cooperated with the upcoming one, and sought support and expertise of the Permanent Secretariat of the Adriatic and Ionian Initiative in Ancona.

In addition, the Minister presented Serbia's plans for further active participation in the Adriatic and Ionian Initiative and EUSAIR, especially taking into consideration that Serbia would take

part in the Trio Presidency, after the end of its Chairmanship.

On 1 June 2020, the Republic of Slovenia will take over the Chairmanship of the Adriatic and Ionian Initiative and EUSAIR from the Republic of Serbia and, on this occasion, Minister Dacic wished them a lot of success in their capacity as the new Chair.

Statement by the First Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Serbia Ivica Dacic at the video conference of the Adriatic and Ionian Council/Ministerial Meeting of the EU Strategy for the Adriatic and Ionian Region (EUSAIR):

"Excellencies,
Your Excellency, Mr. Castellaneta,
Dear colleagues,
Ladies and gentlemen,

I would like to thank you for accepting our invitation to take part in today's meeting, organised taking full advantage of modern technology.

When the Republic of Serbia assumed its one-year Presidency of the Adriatic and Ionian Initiative and Chairmanship of the EU Strategy for the Adriatic and Ionian Region, I had plans for the period ahead. As I said at the meeting in Budva, held on 8 May 2019, I had a plan for Serbia to continue to deepen cooperation in the framework of the Adriatic and Ionian region while also planning, in my capacity as Minister of Foreign Affairs of the chair country, to build on the experiences of previous chairs and to closely cooperate with the incoming one, counting on the support and expertise of the Permanent Secretariat of the Adriatic and Ionian Initiative seated in Ancona.

I am also confident that all of you who know me are aware that I had also planned to bring the Serbian All Presidency/EUSAIR Chairmanship to an end at the 5th Annual Forum that would, in addition to our regular joint work, provide you with an opportunity to visit Belgrade and enjoy the traditional Serbian hospitality. And then all of a sudden, virtually overnight, "life happened to us". In the course of my political career, I have learned that "life" is indeed what happens to us while we are busy making plans for the future. What happened to all of us was the COVID-19 virus pandemic which grew into an unprecedented threat to all of the participating countries of the Adriatic and Ionian Initiative and to the Adriatic and Ionian region as a whole. We were all forced to impose protective measures that were of similar character throughout the Adriatic and Ionian region, informally referring to them as the "Stay at Home" measures.

What was the impact of the coronavirus pandemic on the Republic of Serbia as the current chair of the Adriatic and Ionian Initiative and EUSAIR, and how did it affect our joint work? We were all struck by the pandemic at the time when Serbia, fully supported by the All Secretariat, had already carried out 17 out of the 35 activities envisaged in the chairmanship Calendar of Events. The pandemic happened to us as we were making plans with the All Secretariat and all of the participating countries for the marking of the 20th anniversary of our Initiative. It broke out at the time when we were making joint efforts with the European Commission, the Facility Point and all

of you, working with great enthusiasm to identify future priorities of the EU Strategy for the Adriatic and Ionian Region (the Embedding process) and when the list of the Flagship Projects for all four pillars of the Strategy was on the verge of being finalised. The pandemic happened just as the Chamber of Commerce and Industry of Serbia, having become a regular member of the Forum of the Adriatic and Ionian Chambers of Commerce at the beginning of Serbian chairmanship, was ready to organise a number of events aimed at the solidification of our mutual cooperation.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Another question that inevitably arises is what is the current situation of our joint activities and what expectations can we have for the future? I am pleased to be able to say that, despite the difficult challenges faced amid the coronavirus pandemic, we have succeeded in maintaining continuity in the implementation of the fundamental values we adopted by signing the Ancona Declaration 20 years ago. Through our joint efforts, concurrently with the traditional activities, we managed to continue pursuing the so-called new activities launched during the previous chairmanship, such as the activity of the Trio Presidency. The process aimed at expanding All participation demonstrated in last year's Budva Declaration and the admission of North Macedonia and San Marino to membership of the Initiative, successfully continued during the chairmanship of the Republic of Serbia, too. In this context, I take this opportunity to congratulate once again to our colleagues from North Macedonia as their country became the ninth participating country of the EU Strategy for the Adriatic and Ionian Region in full capacity on 2 April 2020, and to say that I am pleased that they will together with Italian and Serbian experts coordinate the work of Pillar 2 – Connecting the Region. I take this opportunity to also congratulate our colleagues from the All Permanent Secretariat in Ancona and our colleagues from San Marino on the successful development and adoption of the amendments to the All Rules of Procedure, that were, naturally, a requirement in the context of the admission of new participating countries to the Initiative.

In the course of its outgoing chairmanship, the Republic of Serbia also endeavoured to take some new steps further in its capacity as chair. Let me illustrate this by two examples. First, we attempted to add a new value to the holding of All Roundtables, as one of the key All mechanisms, by organising the All Round Table on "Labour Force Emigration" in a way that it was chaired by a responsible Minister of the Government of the Republic of Serbia and with participation of the Serbian Government Minister dealing with specific issues in this field. And second, we reaffirmed the principle of "subsidiarity", as essentially the key framework for the work of the Adriatic and Ionian Initiative, by holding for the first time in the Initiative's history a joint meeting of the representatives of the Chair's Foreign Ministry, representatives from the Permanent Secretariat in Ancona, with the representatives of the Forum of Adriatic and Ionian Cities and UniAdriion – members of the academia.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Much of the work we had done together with the Permanent Secretariat was included in the "Annual Report of the Results of the Activities of the All Permanent Secretariat" which was distributed to all on 21 May 2020. Your Excellency, Mr. Castellaneta, I would like to express my

gratitude for evaluating Serbia's Chairmanship-in-Office as "successful and dynamic" in this report. I would also like to express my gratitude to your team for providing all the necessary expertise and assistance during our chairmanship. I hope that the letter my colleague Minister Joksimovic and I just sent, on behalf of all of us, based on the decision made at the 10th meeting of the Governing Board of the EU Strategy for the Adriatic and Ionian Region (EUSAIR), to the European Commissioner for Neighbourhood and Enlargement Oliver Varhelyi, will further contribute to the deepening of our good cooperation with the European Commission. To conclude, I would like to reiterate Serbia's commitment to the values of the Adriatic and Ionian Initiative and its corresponding Strategy, as a framework within which we conduct activities that strengthen the European path of the countries like mine - which are not yet full-fledged EU Member States - all the while creating an even better place to live in its participating EU Member States.

Along with an unequivocal readiness to cooperate further with all participating countries of the Adriatic and Ionian Initiative, I wish our Slovenian colleagues a lot of success in their capacity as the upcoming Chair.

Dear friends,

Finally, I would like to add one final remark: no matter how useful modern technologies are, they cannot replace human interaction and hospitality. For this reason, I will be delighted to see you all in person soon, perhaps even here in Belgrade."