

12th/Twelfth Adriatic-Ionian Council - Intervento dell'On. Ministro (versione originale)

Ancona 05 Maggio 2010

Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is my pleasure to open the twelfth Adriatic and Ionian Council – hosted once again in Ancona, as it was ten years ago when the Adriatic and Ionian Initiative was established. In 2000, the Council was convened here in this very building where we are now sitting, Palazzo degli Anziani. But our meeting today has a new task. **Its aim is to evaluate how to further strengthen and step up our cooperation in the medium period within a European strategy for the Adriatic-Ionian Region.** In this, we must learn from past successes while also considering the new challenges that lie ahead.

The AII's first ten years: successes achieved and the need for a quality leap – Since 2000, we have been guided by our commitments, starting with the Ancona Declaration of 20 May of that year, as well as by the principles and values of the European Union. We need to underscore **the results achieved by the Adriatic-Ionian Initiative** during these years in strengthening political cooperation, fostering good neighbourly relations and promoting economic development among the participating states. **In its ten years' existence, the Adriatic-Ionian Initiative has played a part, along with other exercises in regional cooperation, in changing the historic outlook of the Balkans.** It has eased the passage from an era of conflict and confrontation to one of dialogue and collaboration, and has gone on to identify common interests for the countries of the region. It has helped give concrete form and content to their “European perspective”.

Over these ten years we have seen confirmed the Adriatic-Ionian region's strong common features – historical, economic, and cultural – and seen it build up a significant experience of integration. **I am speaking here of a region with territories that are already closely linked by various forms of cross-border cooperation.** First amongst them is – of course – the Adriatic-Ionian Initiative. But they also include the Adriatic Cross-border Programme, the Adriatic Euroregion, the UniAdriatic University Network and the Forum of Adriatic-Ionian Cities and Chambers of Commerce, to mention just the most significant examples at both intergovernmental and grassroots level.

It is this level of interdependence and synergy that has created a common interest for all our countries in working to ensure that the region achieves new and more important successes in terms of socio-economic performance. **But to do so we need to make a quality leap in our approach to regional cooperation. We need to ensure that our expectations and needs can be expressed and conveyed in a more coherent and effective manner.**

A European Union of 27 member states requires more precise and clearly defined sub-regional liaison and coordination – albeit in a framework of common policies and objectives. **Globalisation**, which has obliged each and all of us to develop greater economic competitiveness, demands more advanced forms of regional integration. **An area like the western Balkans**, advancing along the path to Brussels, requires new forms of support and motivation if it is to be helped effectively through the European integration process.

A new instrument to launch: a European strategy for the Adriatic and Ionian – Taking this context as our starting point, to achieve a true quality leap we need a European strategy for the Adriatic and Ionian, a strategy that includes all the countries of the region.

Greece, Slovenia and Italy are ready to make all possible contacts at EU level to promote this initiative with all the EU institutions. The Commission plays a decisive role in the process of drawing up the Strategy. We have already started our consultations with the Commission and we have already found a common ground on which our joint endeavour can be developed. Moreover, our intention of launching a Strategy has already been introduced – successfully – by Secretary of State Mantica at the Forum on European macro-regions which was organised by the Committee of the Regions and took place in Brussels some weeks ago. Also the Presidents of the Parliaments of the Adriatic-Ionian Initiative countries invited the EU institutions to define such a Strategy in their meeting in Bari, on 29 April 2010.

The Adriatic-Ionian region has all the prerequisites to act as a macro-region for which a strategic approach based on common problems and opportunities should be developed. A macro-region with the capacity to interact without duplications and to create synergies with other European macro-regions. This would give it the possibility of adapting the available instruments to the features specific to each set of circumstances. Without in so doing losing sight of the overall, single goal of strengthening the cohesion of the European Union as a whole.

In addition to the European Union and the states concerned, we aim at fully involving regions and other territorial bodies in this process. These actors can boast a long experience of cross-border cooperation, while each is fully aware of the potential, strong points and problems of their own territories. The regions are often able to operate more effectively than other actors in implementing projects of concrete, decentralised interest to their citizens, while also ensuring that these are consistent with national development policies.

The EU approach to macro-regions: a philosophy with which Italy is in full agreement –Italy has looked carefully at the EU approach on macro-regions. It is an approach that we are convinced is worth following without hesitation in those regional areas that are equipped and ready to adopt it. In our view, an EU Strategy is the tool that best responds to the principles of trans-national territorial integration, cohesion and inclusiveness. And **Italy fully agrees with the three “nos” upon which an EU macro-region strategy should be built: no new funds, no new legislation, and no new institutions.** The basic objectives of the Strategy will therefore be better co-ordination of resources, more coherent implementation of regulations and laws, and the most appropriate use of existing structures.

I hope that our common Strategy will take its place in the new architecture of cross-border cooperation that is taking shape with the macro-regional strategies. **We have been following, in particular, the work that the Baltic Sea macro-region has already embarked upon.** The presence among us today of high ranking representatives of the Council of the Baltic Sea States testifies to our willingness to learn from and establish links with them and to draw on the Baltic experience. We also look with keen interest to the work that the Danube macro-region will be undertaking once it is formalised.

We will need to be bold and show overall strategic far-sightedness, considering that the timescale for finalising a macro-region runs to some years. **The process could be completed in 2014, when first Greece and then Italy will exercise the EU Presidency.** The horizon we are contemplating for drawing up and implementing the Strategy is, therefore, broad. Broad enough to allow us to bring the priorities we will be working on into line with those that will be set out in the 2020 Strategy and which will emerge as the future EU financial outlook takes shape. This will bring us perfectly into line with the EU’s strategic guidelines in matters of development and integration.

The AII's role in developing a European strategy for the region: an asset to exploit – The Adriatic and Ionian Initiative and its Permanent Secretariat are an important basis from which to develop a European Strategy for the region. **We are well aware of the difficulties that might arise in coordinating policies and interventions** among different Countries and involving multiple levels of government, from national to local. However, we are confident that the decade-long habit of working together through the Adriatic and Ionian Initiative will prove to be a key asset for the Adriatic-Ionian macro-region.

It is precisely that existing experience that will facilitate the Adriatic and Ionian Initiative in identifying the possible thematic areas of the Strategy. Bearing in mind the features specific to a maritime region, themes such as the environment, port security, “highways of the sea”, transport, energy, fishing, tourism and culture are obvious areas for cooperation. But accessibility, fire defences, coastal management, rural development, inter-university cooperation, civil protection and SME cooperation also, by their very nature, lend themselves well to enhanced cooperation.

The strategy's external dimension: a political signal for the western Balkans – Yet the Strategy we would like to design together is not only inward looking. It will also have a vitally important external outlook. Our assumption is that macro-regions, and the Adriatic-Ionian in particular, also contribute **to establishing more profound relationships with neighbouring territories and states both within and outside the EU.**

Indeed, we think that an important added value of the Adriatic-Ionian Strategy will be **the confirmation of a political signal to the countries of the Western Balkans:** a renewed focus on the prospects for concrete collaboration. This would be developed in tandem with the more complex process leading to their future membership of the European Union, to which family they naturally belong. The creation of an Adriatic-Ionian macro-region would therefore be a useful tool in facilitating the completion of the enlargement process with respect to that region.

In the Italian view we need to take into account that **globalisation has suggested a more dynamic way to look at the EU enlargement process and the relationship between Europe and the Balkans.** In my recent visits to Sarajevo, Tirana, Belgrade and Pristina I conveyed a clear political message: welcoming the Balkan countries, and Turkey, into the European family is a challenge to grasp and win, if the Union truly aspires to play a more high-profile role on the global stage. If it aims to exert a greater influence in the Caucasus, in central Asia, in the Middle East and in the Mediterranean. If it wants to recover economic competitiveness and guarantee its energy security more effectively.

The Conference which the Spanish Presidency, in agreement with Italy, is preparing to hold in Sarajevo next June is a confirmation that stronger regional cooperation and the integration of the western Balkans with the EU are two sides of the same coin.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

The Italian chairmanship of the Adriatic and Ionian Initiative is drawing to an end. During that chairmanship we have sought to develop a broad-ranging strategy by enhancing the dialogue between the Adriatic-Ionian Initiative and the EU; strengthening relations between the AII and the other regional organisations operating in central and south-east Europe; and establishing closer links with the Union for the Mediterranean. We have also sought to strengthen the AII's parliamentary dimension and to spur a **“project-oriented” approach.** This would be designed to promote concrete initiatives of common interest that should attract Community co-funding.

We view as a concrete success of our chairmanship the completion of various Protocols for strengthening regional cooperation within the Adriatic and Ionian Initiative in fields such as SMEs, culture, tourism and rural development. We also view as a positive development the prospect of further strengthening the Adriatic Ionian Initiative Permanent Secretariat.

In 2008, Italy and Marche Region undertook to support the establishment and operation of the Permanent Secretariat for an initial period of 3 years. We are confident that the valuable work carried out by the Secretariat so far in coordinating and helping the Chairmanships to implement their programmes will be further strengthened in the future with the help of other members.

We consider that the Italian Chairmanship has been a concrete step towards achieving our goals. Italy is glad to have received the support of all Adriatic–Ionian Initiative members for our activities and for the dialogue and continuous exchanges of views that testify, once more, to the Adriatic and Ionian countries' commitment to regional cooperation. **We welcome the Montenegrin Chairmanship**, whose mandate will formally begin on 1 June 2010. I wish them every success in their work, and I can assure them of Italy's full cooperation and support.