

The Adriatic Euroregion, Strategic Institution-building

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The initiative of setting up an Adriatic Euroregion (AE) has been launched by the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities (CLRAE) of the Council of Europe with the support of the Region of Istria (Croatia) and the Region of Molise (Italy) and has received growing international, national, regional and local support. A number of institutions acknowledged this initiative as highly deliverable, thereby helping to broaden the overall consensus. A series of international conferences, held in the last ten years in a number of countries in the Adriatic area have expressed, in their final declarations, a widely shared desire to ensure proper support to the new initiative, generally seen as a tool for co-operation and a means of paving the way for the south-east European countries to accede to the European Union.

1. The Adriatic Euroregion Founding Conference

The idea to launch a concrete cooperation between the regional and local authorities in order to contribute to the development of the Adriatic area, became a reality in Pula (Croatia) on 30 June 2006, the day in which the founding conference of the Adriatic Euroregion took place. The event was attended alongside with the representatives of the member-regions, representatives of the Council of Europe and the Committee of the Regions, as well as by the President of the Republic of Croatia Mr. Stipe Mesić, the President of the Republic of Bosnia and Herzegovina Mr. Sulejman Tihić and by the Vice Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Italy Mr. Famiano Crucianelli.

The Adriatic is not only a sea. The Adriatic is a noble homeland for millions of citizens living in the area, for whom it

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represents, at the same time, hope and fidget, challenge and destiny, promise and chance. The third millennium has brought new challenges like the global warming, the economic and cultural globalisation, therefore the need to find new and innovative answers to these challenges represents a prerequisite. «The Adriatic Euroregion is aiming to become the expression of a new and modern European architecture of friendship and co-operation between its members» said the President of the AE Ivan Jakovčić.

«We believe that the cross border co-operation between the Adriatic Euroregion's members will contribute to the solution of common problems in the field of environmental protection, sustainable touristic-development, transport and infrastructure. It is only through joint initiatives that common problems may be tackled» was stressed by the Vice President of the AE Michele Iorio. Mr. Giovanni Di Stasi, President of the CLRAE of the Council of Europe, highlighted the following: «The Adriatic Euroregion was thought in Strasbourg and Brussels, but it was born, here today, thanks to the active involvement and will of several region's presidents and mayors through a series of meetings which contributed to the institutionalisation of this instrument for integration and collaboration».

The President of the Republic of Croatia Mr. Stipe Mesić concluded with the following: «I would like that this initiative doesn't live only within its administrative and political borders, but rather for the interests of its citizens. Moreover, I wish that the Adriatic Euroregion will develop into the sea light of European processes and integration». Following the founding conference of the Adriatic Euroregion, the office of the Secretariat was solemnly opened in Pula.

2. II Assembly Meeting of the Adriatic Euroregion

The II Assembly meeting represented the end of the preparatory phase of the Adriatic Euroregion: on 22 November 2006, the constitutive bodies were elected and the Adriatic Euroregion was able to start its work.

The members of the Executive Board are composed by a balanced presence of representatives from both sides of the Adriatic, namely, the Italian Regions Friuli-Venezia Giulia,

Veneto and Marche, the Croatian County of Split and Dalmatia, Montenegro and Albania supported in its work by the President and Vice President of the Adriatic Euroregion. The Executive Board holds regular sessions at least once every six months, each time in a different member state.

Decisions of the Executive Board shall be in effect provided by the presence of the majority of its members. The Executive Board is convoked by the President of the AE by his decision, on demand by the Vice President, or else when it is demanded by one third of the members of the Executive Board or the Supervisory Board.

The Supervisory Board supervises the implementation of acts adopted by the bodies of the AE and the regularity of material and financial business activities. The Board is composed by one Albanian representative, one Croatian (Dubrovnik-Neretva County) and one Italian (Regione Puglia) Region.

The II Assembly meeting brought the proposal to constitute the Adriatic Euroregion's Commissions. The aim is to develop the activities of the Adriatic Euroregion in five thematic areas: fishery, environment, transport and infrastructure, culture and tourism, productive/economic affairs.

Alongside with the mentioned Commissions, an important role is played by the Commission for Institutional Matters, chaired by the Italian Region Abruzzo.

Working Commissions' Constitution

In accordance with the proposal taken during the II Assembly meeting held in Ancona, and in order to officially constitute the thematic Commissions of the Adriatic Euroregion, a two-days meeting was organised by the Secretariat in collaboration with the Region of Istria, in Brijuni Island (Croatia), on 16 and 17 April 2007.

The two-days meeting represented the first gathering of that kind, which grouped political and technical representatives of member-regions. The aim was to give a Presidency and Vice Presidency to each Commission which will be in charge of drafting the annual working program and coordinate the Commissions' work and activities. Every Adriatic Euroregion member has the right to be represented in each of the five Commissions with at least one member.

The agreed Commission's composition is as follows:

- Commission for Culture and Tourism, Presidency: Region Puglia (IT), Vice Presidencies: Region of Istria (HR) and Qarkut Lezha (AL);
- Commission for Fisheries, Presidency: Zadar County (HR). Vice Presidencies: Veneto Region (IT) and Qarkut Vlore (AL);
- Commission for Transport and Infrastructure, Presidency: Primorsko-Goranska County (HR), Vice Presidencies: Qarkut Shkodër (AL) and Region Molise (IT);
- Commission for Environment, Presidency: Region Emilia Romagna (IT), Vice Presidencies: County of Sibenik and Split (HR) and Municipality of Kotor (MO);
- Commission for Productive and Economic Affairs, Presidency: Qarkut Fier (AL), Vice Presidencies: Region Marche (IT) and Municipality of Kotor (MO).

Opening of the Adriatic Euroregion Liaison Office in Brussels

After the important achievements reached further to the foundation of the AE, the opening of the Liaison Office in Brussels on 11 June 2007 represented the definitive next step. The opening event was attended by important political and diplomatic personalities: the Secretary General of the Committee of the Regions Mr. Gerard Stahl, the Croatian State Secretary Mrs. Marija Buric Pejcinovic, the Vice Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Italy Mr. Famiano Crucianelli, representatives from DG REGIO, which contributed to enrich the program through enhancing the diversity of perspectives and content represented. The office is located in the premises of the Regional representation office in Bruxelles of the Region Molise.

3. III Assembly Meeting of the Adriatic Euroregion

The III Assembly meeting of the Adriatic Euroregion was organised in collaboration with the Qarkut Shkodër and the Albanian Ministry of Interior, on 21 September 2007. It was a definitive step towards the formalisation of the work and activities of the association. The event was attended by

prominent representatives of the Council of Europe, Albanian government and the Albanian President Rami Topi. President Topi opened the session saying: «This Assembly allows the member countries to become part of the big European family. It re-establishes the connection that we had in the past in the economical and cultural terms. The Adriatic Euroregion represents a new initiative based on ancient historical roots».

The host of the event, the President of the Qarkut Shkodër Mr. Kolombi, welcomed the participants and stressed that: «It is important to make every common effort that this strong organisation make the marketing of great opportunities which the region offers. The coordination of the activities for the necessary intervention will be of mutual utility. We hope that this meeting will strengthen the collaboration and friendship through the regions of the Adriatic coast».

During the III Assembly meeting the President of the AE was reconfirmed for a mandate of two years in the person of Mr. Ivan Jakovčić, President of the Region of Istria (HR). The Vice President, Mr. Michele Iorio, President of the Region Molise (IT), was re-elected for a mandate of two years as well. The composition of the Executive and Supervisory Board was reconfirmed as in the previous temporary mandate. The working program for 2008 was unanimously accepted by all members, stressing the importance of integrated and coordinated actions in the whole Adriatic area.

Meeting with Commissioner Hübner

On 22 January 2008 President Jakovčić, Vice President Iorio and the members of the Executive Board of the Adriatic Euroregion met in Brussels with Commissioner Danuta Hübner. During the meeting the realised activities and future initiatives of the association were presented, alongside with some project ideas carried out by the Adriatic Euroregion's thematic Commissions. For instance to promote the matching of the labour demand and supply by developing specific channels of work mobility and training; to balance the socio-economic disparities in the area and to contribute to the growth and prosperity of the region.

Mrs. Hübner has stressed the importance of the organisation as means of encouraging the integration of south-eastern

countries in the European Union. The exchange of views with the Commissioner and her willingness to increase the Adriatic Euroregion's visibility in the European scenario represent a great contribution to the growth and strengthening of the association.

Presentation of the Adriatic Euroregion to the Council of Europe

On 29 May 2008 in Strasbourg, during the Plenary Session of the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe, the Adriatic Euroregion presented its activities.

During the Assembly, which was presided over by the newly-elected President of the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities Yavuz Mildon, the President Jakovčić and the Vice President Iorio highlighted not only the results obtained by the Adriatic Euroregion through a synergistic collaboration between the members, but also the need to look to the future of the Adriatic area with a new perspective. The projects to which the AE Commissions are working on, in the field of tourism, sustainable development, ecosystem and fisheries protection, transport field improvement, typical products protection and valorisation, were also considered to be of the utmost importance for the Adriatic economy.

4. IV Assembly Meeting of the Adriatic Euroregion

The IV Adriatic Euroregion Assembly meeting was held in Ferrara on 25 and 26 September 2008. During the two days of works the Adriatic Euroregion Assembly and the Supervisory Board met in the Estense Castle.

During the meeting the Prefecture of Corfu and the Municipality of Tivat became members of the Adriatic Euroregion with the official signature of its representatives. Following these adhesions, the members of the AE rose up to 24 with Greece that joined the members of the association as well. Members expressed positive evaluation over the work of the Commissions that are working on integrated projects, on the basis of shared needs, and that will try to have financial support by EU programs.

For this purpose, the AE members have settled to strengthen further the activities of the Adriatic Euroregion and to integrate the huge number of proposals submitted to the Commissions, giving particular emphasis to the projects which provide investments in infrastructures in the framework of the Program of Territorial Cross Border Cooperation - IPA Adriatic 2007-2013.

5. V Assembly Meeting of the Adriatic Euroregion

The V Assembly meeting of the Adriatic Euroregion was held on 22 October 2009 in Split. The President of the Splitsko-Dalmatinska County, Mr. Ante Sanader opened the Assembly at the presence of the representative of the Croatian Ministry, Mrs. Zeljka Baric. During the session all the Bodies of the AE were reconfirmed: Mr. Jakovčić for another mandate as President, Mr. Michele Iorio as Vice President, the AE Executive Board, Supervisory Board and the members of the working Commissions.

A new thematic Commission, the 6th Commission for Welfare, has been constituted under the Presidency of Greek Prefecture of Thesprotia, the 25th new member of the AE, with Region Emilia Romagna (IT) and the Hercegovacko-Neretvanska County (BiH) at the Vice Presidency. The main item on the agenda was the initiative for the adoption of the Adriatic strategy with which the Adriatic Euroregion intends to bring the European institutions up to date about the need for the creation of an Adriatic development strategy. Considering the European Strategy for the Baltic Area as point of reference, a strategy for Adriatic Sea will contribute to promote a coordinated and integrated development, shortening the disparities which persist in the Adriatic basin. The Adriatic Strategy has been solemnly presented to European institutions in the seat of the Committee of the Regions of the European Union in Brussels on 24 February 2010.

6. Future Initiatives and Challenges

We may conclude that the Adriatic Euroregion has already

justified its reasons for establishment in this initial phase, namely:

- AE has become a well-known and unique institution in the Adriatic area in line with the contemporary social and political requirements;
- the dialogue between regional and local political actors on both sea banks of the Adriatic, in six different states, has been fostered;
- AE has developed into an inevitable political instrument for the rethinking of the Adriatic future;
- AE represents the institutional background for the identification and solution of shared problems;
- AE has acquired an institutional form, legal identity, the organisational structure and has accomplished the foundation of its organs;
- two offices have been opened in Pula and Brussels, the Secretariat is successfully running, the basic funds for its operation have been obtained and its *modus operandi* has been well accepted.

These points represent the preconditions for the continuation of the future activities, which are focusing on the following:

- further empowerment of the financial, organisational and staff capabilities;
- further presentation and promotion of the activities of the Adriatic Euroregion in front of the EU institutions and other international bodies;
- further strengthening of mutual dialogue and cooperation between the member regions;
- continuation with the work of the thematic Commissions and the additional creation of concrete projects with integrated impact;
- detection of further financing possibilities for the implementation of joint project ideas;
- expansion of the capability to realise programs supported by EU funds;
- *last but not least*, analysis of the possibilities of creating a European Grouping of Territorial Cooperation, EGTC.

As it is clear from this short outline, the Adriatic Euroregion is still developing and growing in the European scenario, its

positive accomplishments and future outcomes will depend on the continuation of the effective work of its members. A new model of cooperation on the Adriatic has been developed as well as a new construction model for a stable European Adriatic home. Furthermore, the Adriatic Euroregion may be distinguished as an instrument for faster integration of the south-eastern European states into a common Europe and as an example of a modern regional European political infrastructure, a model that could be implemented on other European areas.

