EU strategy for the Adriatic and Ionian region

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The Committee on Regional Development adopted the report by Ivan JAKOVI (ADLE, HR) on an EU strategy for the Adriatic and Ionian region.

The report welcomed the Commission communication concerning the European Union Strategy for the Adriatic and Ionian Region and the accompanying action plan. It underlined the importance of the strategy being based on the **principles of integration, coordination, cooperation and partnership**, whilst reiterating the importance of the "three NOs" principle of no new legislation, no new institutions, no new funding.

The EU Strategy for the Adriatic and Ionian Region (EUSAIR) is part of the EU regional policy. It is a tool for promoting economic and social cohesion, with the principal objectives of reducing disparities between regions, promoting real convergence and encouraging growth and employment.

Members encouraged all national, regional and local stakeholders to take full ownership of the implementation of the projects covered by this macro-regional strategy. They stressed the need for: (i) a **place-based approach** as regards the cooperation activities; (ii) the inclusion of the local and regional authorities in the political managing bodies and in the operational, technical and implementing bodies of the strategy; (iii) a **transparent** process for adoption, monitoring and evaluation of the strategy, as well as of openness and inclusiveness towards civil society and all relevant stakeholders.

The report made a series of recommendations which focused on the following:

(1) Blue growth: the report stressed that the region's unique geographical position and specific coastline structure, together with its rich marine biodiversity, hold **immense potential for the creation of 'blue' jobs** and for innovative and sustainable economic development and growth, including **blue technologies, fisheries and aquaculture**, and better maritime and marine governance and services.

Members advocated, *inter alia*:

- the creation of new jobs and economic development, and especially jobs for women and **young people** in coastal and island countries;
- a policy to coordinate and harmonise the strategy's goals, as well as common projects, in line with the **values, principles and objectives of the Common Fisheries Policy**;
- promoting the various sectors of blue growth in their **training programmes;**
- clustering and **cooperation between public and private enterprises, universities, research institutes** and other relevant stakeholders in the marine and maritime sectors;
- the creation of a **joint quality label** for high-quality seafood products from the region in order to increase their competitiveness;
- the protection and **preservation of fish stocks and marine ecosystems**, to be a paramount objective of the strategy;
- support for **shipbuilding**, including the leisure boat sector;
- the involvement of fisheries and fishery workers in projects such as those relating to cultural and heritage tourism.

(2) Connecting the region: the report noted that better transport and energy connections among the participating countries as well as between them and their other neighbours. It also stressed the importance of:

- establishing **sustainable transport links** which reduce journey times, transport and logistic costs and externalities as well as major strategic works related to the interchange between sea and land;
- underlining the importance of connecting maritime transport routes and ports with other parts of Europe;
- identifying priority infrastructure projects of regional and European added value;
- developing a **high-speed railway infrastructure** that will interconnect the macro-region;
- implementating major projects to develop intermodal links on the islands;
- developing **energy infrastructure** capable of reducing the carbon footprint, increasing energy efficiency and guaranteeing the energy security of the macro-region and beyond.

(3) Environmental quality: recalling that the Adriatic Sea is home to nearly half (49%) of all recorded Mediterranean marine species, Members called for joint efforts in taking all possible measures, such as the use of clean fuels for maritime transport and logistics, in order to preserve the biodiversity of the marine environment.

The report pointed out the need to **tackle responsibly historical and trans-border pollution** and to clean up the sites affected by the industrial contamination of soil, water and air, and, where applicable, by pollution resulting from military conflicts. It called for the establishment of a **regional centre for disaster preparedness** together with a joint contingency plan for oil spills and large-scale pollution events, in order to create an early warning system to prevent natural disasters and those caused by industrial, transport and other activities.

(4) Sustainable and competitive tourism: the report underlined the crucial importance of tourism for the European economy and urged more support for the financing of tourism projects from the European Structural and Investment Funds (ESIF). It recommended:

- the urgent improvement of **cross-border road connections** in order to enhance the competitiveness of tourism;
- the promotion of **sustainable and more balanced tourist flows** in various locations;
- encouraging Member States to promote **sustainable mobility** solutions in the tourism sector, thus improving the quality of tourist services and enhancing its range;
- the development of a **diversified tourism offer** including thematic tourist parks and routes, and cultural, rural, health, medical, nautical, eno-gastronomic, conference and sport tourism, including cycling, golf, diving, hiking, skiing, mountaineering and outdoor sports, in order to promote tourism throughout the year.