The action AI-NURECC PLUS has received funding from the European Union
The action AI-NURECC PLUS has received funding from the European Union and proposed using this opportunity to increase youth involvement in governance of regional cooperation platforms.

The priorities of the Albanian 2021-2022 EUSAIR Presidency and All Chairmanship, by Redi Shtino, Advisor to the Minister, Ministry for Europe and Foreign Affairs, Republic of Albania

Mr Shtino started by congratulating the AI-NURECC PLUS initiative for the promotion of a structured dialogue and effective cooperation among the different stakeholders. Speaking on behalf of Minister Xhacka, he reinforced Albania’s commitment to the values of All and EUSAIR, and the promotion of regional cooperation along with interacting for joint projects to accelerate the European integration process. He stated the three main priorities of Albania’s Chairmanship-in-office, the first two being Culture and tourism, pointing at the issues that need to be dealt with cooperatively at a regional level. Seconding previous speeches on the importance of youth as a target group, he discussed opportunities to involve them in policy-making and networking with the All region’s youth community. The third priority raised by Mr Shtino was the promotion of the Blue Economy pillar in the All region, owing to the strong sectors of fisheries and tourism in the region. Both sectors provide a high return on investment and socio-economic and cultural significance for coastal communities.

Amb. Giovanni Castellaneta, Secretary General of the Adriatic and Ionian Initiative (AII)
Starting off by introducing the initiative’s support and stakeholders, Amb. Castellaneta stressed on the importance of cooperation, subsidiarity, and involvement of qualified civil society as a means to moving forward the European Union Strategy for the Adriatic and Ionian Region (EUSAIR). He equally thanked both the prior AII Slovenian and current Albanian chairmanship for their pro-active approaches. He emphasised on the bottom-up involvement of qualified representatives of civil societies who can make concrete contributions to the work of round tables. He then focused on one of the priorities of the permanent secretariat, investing in young people, in terms of scholarships (for example the collaboration with Università Politecnica delle Marche, in Italy), internships and concrete opportunities as a means to strengthen the Western Balkans. Another notable example is the initiative named “Active Young Citizens for Sustainable Development in CEI and All areas” aimed at raising awareness in high school students to the sustainable goals of the UN Agenda 2030.

Maria Spyra, Member of the European Parliament, leader of the European Parliament “Friends of the EUSAIR” interest group – Video Message (see the recording of the meeting)
Ms Spyra started her contribution mentioning AI-NURREC promotes an effective participation of the partners in a bottom-up approach. The topics of sustainable tourism, cultural and creative industries and circular economy will be supported, along with the involvement of youth. With other supported actions and initiatives (e.g. the EUSAIR Facility Point) it is meant to support the Adriatic-Ionian region. The EU Parliament supports the initiative. The objective is to cooperate with many actors working for the area (Members of the European Parliament, CPMR, Regional Authorities, …) and the objective is to have one yearly event to promote the Adriatic-Ionian region. Ms Spyra underlined the involvement of youth, along with the sustainable actions are very important for the future of the Adriatic-Ionian area.

Guido Castelli, Regional Minister, Marche Region (Italy) and Co-chairing of the CPMR Adriatic-Ionian Task Force
Mr Acquaroli started off by thanking the organizers for their trust in him co-chairing the CPMR’s Adriatic Ionian Task Force together with the President of the Ionian Islands. He then stated some of the characteristics of the Marche region within the Adriatic-Ionian Macroregion: project partners in Facility Point Strategic Project, seat of the secretariat of All, and seat of several partners within Al-
Nikola Dobroslavic, President of Dubrovnik-Neretva County (Croatia), AIE President

Representing local and regional authorities, Mr Dobroslavic highlighted the long-standing work to make communities on both sides of the Adriatic more cohesive to be able to face new challenges, the likes of the COVID-19 pandemic. He pointed to the engagement to assist Western Balkans in their path towards EU accession, citing several milestones along those lines. Next, he listed the possibilities AI-NURECC PLUS will open, relaying experience to local and regional authorities among Western Balkan countries, for example green and innovative ways to achieve post-pandemic recovery. Aiming at the central target group mentioned several times so far, youth, he advised on making them stakeholders in decision-making. The experience from AI-NURECC shows that their strength, competence, and vitality can be capitalized on in this second phase project, since there are the owners of their future in the region.

Ioannis Lolos, Mayor of Igoumenitsa (Greece), FAIC President

Mr Lolos started by reinforcing active involvement of all stakeholders to promote economic and social progress in the Adriatic-Ionian region. He then listed several successes in the predecessor project AI-NURECC, mainly conferences aiming at building and consolidating relationships between civil society, local/regional institutions and European institutions, or events aiming at promoting tourism and cultural heritage as well as youth activities. He hoped that such fruitful collaborations will be capitalized on in AI-NURECC PLUS to face the new challenges this period brings.

Joze Tomaš, President of Split Chamber of Commerce (Croatia), President of Forum AIC

Expressing satisfaction for the role played by the civil society in the predecessor project, Mr Tomaš started off by welcoming the effort put into preparing the AI-NURECC PLUS project proposal. He praised this collective effort and the central role of this initiative for the development of the Adriatic-Ionian area and the post-COVID-19 pandemic recovery. He next highlighted the role of the Forum of the Chambers of Commerce in adopting circular economy strategies and promoting innovative entrepreneurship and youth involvement in creative and cultural enterprises, as well as sustainable tourism in the Adriatic-Ionian region; all of which are priority issues that will be tackled throughout AI-NURECC PLUS. President Tomaš insisted on the importance of one particular aspect of the predecessor project: scholarships and training of young future entrepreneurs, an investment that paid off in terms of innovative and sustainable practices in the tourism industry and in the preservation and promotion of cultural heritage. He concluded by highlighting the relevance of reinforcing and expanding existing networks; these synergies will be indispensable in achieving the goals set out in AI-NURECC PLUS.

Prof. Fatbardh Sallaku, Rector of Agricultural University of Tirana (Albania), President of UniAdrion

Prof. Sallaku started off by pointing to the initiatives that had not stopped during the pandemic, only changed format. The driving force behind was the European integration, synergies between the stakeholders and regional cooperation. He then highlighted the importance of AI-NURECC PLUS in strengthening and improving cooperation between the FORA of the civil society, the AIE and CPMR, all driving the accomplishment of EUSAIR’s political objectives. He reinforced the efficiency of the bottom-up approach of the FORA. UniAdrion, he continued, developed during the predecessor
project, the “UniAdrion Platform”, a map of research and innovation capabilities of the universities in the Macroregion. He asserted the fact that participation in the new project will be as fruitful and successful.

10:50-12:10  TOWARDS THE AI-NURECC PLUS KEY ACTIONS IMPLEMENTATION

Actions on Cultural and Creative Industries and specific fund for internships supporting youth, by Prof. Andrea Perna, Secretary General of UniAdrion

Prof. Perna started off his presentation by listing the fields in which AI-NURECC PLUS will be operating, stressing on the fact that the important field is: Cultural and Creative Industries Actions. A reason behind that, he explains, is that they are drivers of socio-economic development, a concept that has a proven track record around the EU. He elaborated on the uniqueness of the Western Balkans in the cultural and creative industry sector, a condition that requires cooperation across the Adriatic-Ionian area to surpass the challenges they will face when developing the relevant policies. He pointed out to this unmet need which AI-NURECC PLUS will tackle, with the good practices and experiences to share. One role that can be played in this context by universities, among which UniAdrion is new knowledge and skills, being key in social change and development, producing highly skilled manpower and research output, as well as building new institutions of civil society. After all, universities have always been instruments of change. He then elaborated on the foreseen events within this sector, detailing the role each participating partner will play. Furthermore, he stated the aims these events: sharing economic experiences, role of youth in developing competitive and innovative creative and cultural industries, and finding ways to bring macroregional strategies closer to smart specialisation strategies. The overarching role for AI-NURECC PLUS is a facilitator for the accession of the cities of the EUSAIR states in the UNESCO creative sites network. He noted one event in particular that will be held in Serbia, a non-EU Western Balkan country. Focusing on youth, Prof. Perna introduced the internships managed by UniAdrion and the institutions that will host the interns, then he listed the corresponding events focusing on circular economy, sustainable tourism and cultural and creative industries.

“Cultural and Creative Regional Ecosystems (CCRE-S3), the first thematic area focused on the EUSAIR area”, by Fokion Zaimis, Deputy Governor of Entrepreneurship, Research and Innovation, Western Greece Region (Greece) – CCRE-S3 Leader in charge of the Adriatic-Ionian Region, Vice President of the CPMR Intermediterranean Commission (CPMR IMC) and Balkan & Black Sea Commission (CPMR BBSC) Member

Mr Zaimis started off stating that cultural industry is a wide topic. In cooperation with the region of Tuscany in Italy and Aragon in Spain a smart specialization platform on cultural and creative industries has been developed. The reason to start it up was the fact that the area of Patras is one of the oldest industrial cities in Greece and in the Mediterranean. After the severe financial crisis, industry faced harsh consequences but young academics and researchers and the cultural heritage made it possible to develop a cultural and creative ecosystem. There is plenty of experts in design and creative sector. This was the reason to start-up the collaboration with the other two regions in Europe. The JRC supported us with scientific data. Creative industries have a growing importance in the EU. Europe-wide the cultural sector contributes with 11% to the European economy. The public sector organizations offered the space for cultural start-ups. Design, visual arts experts were attracted in order to develop new projects with up to 40% of their costs covered with specific funds. Technology and culture go hand in hand. The President Von der Leyen launched the European Bauhaus Initiative that is very much in line with our current initiatives and such initiatives, that improve the quality of life. These are of even greater importance due to the pandemic and post-
The action AI-NURECC PLUS has received funding from the European Union pandemic times. Mr Zaimis thanked the CPMR for their support in all these initiatives. Social enterprises also need support and SMEs in general need to develop and grow. Mr Zaimis underlined the cooperation of the regions is extremely important, along with cooperation between different professionals. With the developing cooperation with the other Greek regions, there will be further development of these efforts in the cultural and creative industries.

**Actions on Sustainable Tourism, by Michele De Vita, Secretary General of Forum AIC**

Mr De Vita started off by highlighting an essential EUSAIR pillar: tourism. This sector was severely affected by the COVID-19 pandemic, consequently the livelihood of many citizens, namely women, residents of islands and emerging countries. Through several events, involvement of youth and creation of synergies, the Sustainable Tourism action of AI-NURECC PLUS will identify the problems that led to this impact and find solutions for alternative development, under the umbrella of developing sustainable tourism. In his presentation, he detailed the aims of each of these conferences and forums, with an overarching goal of training youth to understand the potential of the region and create adapted solutions that would prevent a devastating impact such as COVID-19 pandemic. The stakeholders involved will be civil society, universities, public-private partnerships, coordinators of EUSAIR pillars, youth organizations etc.

**Fora of Adriatic-Ionian Youth organizations, by Francesco Cocco, Secretary General of AIE**

Mr Cocco underlined the involvement of youth is extremely important. Youth organisations, are very important in AI-NURECC PLUS. Mr Cocco said all other topics previously mentioned were very important but the focus of his contribution will be in the inclusion of youth. The wish is to give voice to young people by involving charities, associations, NGOs. Firstly, the governance is important, there is multi-level governance in the partnership. Secondly, the relationship with the EUSAIR needs to be strengthened, paying attention not to overlap. Additionally, in times of the pandemic it was important to keep in touch but it is important (being this the first years of the new programming period) to gather new ideas, set up new projects and initiatives. Mr Cocco stressed it is important to involve stakeholders, in line with the bottom-up-approach. In the past events for youth organizations have already been organized, the event in Tirana was planned then. The Conference on the future of Europe is an important event where to involve youth. Mr Cocco thanked the staff that is involved in administrative support and the European Commission for funding the new project.

**Genci Kojdheli, Director General of Strategic Projects and Economic Development, Tirana Municipality (Albania), European Youth Capital Activity Tirana 2022**

Mr Kojdheli underlined that the involvement of the many youth organizations made it possible to be selected as European youth capital in 2022 although while the preparation of the project was ongoing, the city was hit by an earthquake. The pandemic times followed and the hope is that by 2022 the situation improves and allows the implementation of the activities that are detailed in 18 different pillars, varying from cultural to environmental topics. The selection allowed also cooperation with other municipalities across Europe (e.g. in Poland and elsewhere) that are currently working on such application and this is a good experience for exchanges and networking.

**Actions on Circular Economy and study on territorial challenges and development, by Ida Simonella, Secretary General of FAIC**

Ms Simonella started off her presentation by identifying the systems weak spots highlighted by the COVID-19 pandemic and the steps taken by the EU policy-makers to tackle these challenges. These include a transition to a circular economy and a cleaner and more competitive Europe. She then elaborated on the concept of circular economy, where economic growth can be achieved by optimizing the use of natural resources, endowing production systems with long-term sustainability
The action AI-NURECC PLUS has received funding from the European Union while minimizing environmental pressures; AI-NURECC PLUS will address this concept through a dedicated action that involves interconnections among stakeholders and conferences for raising awareness. Going into the details of the action, Ms Simonella listed the aims of the specific study on territorial challenges and development in the Adriatic-Ionian Macroregion, as well as the aims of the corresponding conferences to tackle circular economy: from exploring European opportunities related to the circular economy for youth, to involvement of stakeholders of rural development, to supporting SMEs to move from a linear to a circular economic model.

**AI-NURECC PLUS Capitalization and Communication, presentation by Stavros Kalognomos, Executive Secretary of the Balkan & Black Sea Commission of the CPMR, AI-NURECC PLUS Coordinator**

The capitalization plan involves target groups, community-led local development representatives, and conclusion from conferences reflected in policy recommendations, policy papers, and factsheets, pertinent for EUSAIR discussions. The communication tools available for AI-NURECC PLUS were mentioned: a website, newsletter, audiovisual material and social media feeds. Additionally, information will be circulated via EUSAIR outlooks: facility point and online platform.

The capitalization plan involves target groups, community-led local development initiatives, and conclusion from conferences reflected in policy recommendations, policy papers, and factsheets, pertinent for EUSAIR discussions. He then alluded to the communication tools available for AI-NURECC PLUS was explained: a website, newsletter, audiovisual material and social media feeds. Additionally, information will be circulated via EUSAIR outlooks: facility point and online platform. Insularity, rural areas, mountainous areas will be equally considered.

To a question on the involvement of stakeholders by AI-NURREC PLUS, by Mr Cocco replied, underlining that the tools already put in place in the first AI-NURREC project, involving again all the stakeholders. The AI-NURECC PLUS Coordinator highlighted that in the project’s communication, the partnership will be glad to involve the highest number of stakeholders possible.

**12:10-12:30 CONCLUSIONS**

Konstantinos Kapodistrias, Deputy Governor of e-Governance and European Programmes, Ionian Islands Region (Greece), **Co-chairing Region of the CPMR Adriatic-Ionian Task Force**

The Ionian islands region representatives will co-chair, along with the Marche region, the CPMR Adriatic-Ionian Task Force. It will be a great honor to host a meeting in Corfu later on. Mr Kapodistrias recapped the single contributions and underlined the importance of the bottom-up approach, two sides of the Adriatic, the importance of entrepreneurship, cooperation and youth involvement. The need to meet up in person was stressed and the wish for the pandemic period to pass.

Jean-Pierre Halkin, Head of Macro-regions, Transnational / Interregional / External Cooperation, Enlargement (REGIO/DDG.D.1) Unit, Directorate-General for Regional and Urban Policy (DG REGIO), European Commission

Mr Halkin gave the closing remarks, starting off by stressing on the importance of AI-NURECC PLUS in providing scope for discussion of EUSAIR implementation and its imminent revision. He congratulated the network built and how its expertise and diversity represent strong points of this project, alongside its capacity to involve a large number of stakeholders. Furthermore, he pointed to the success of the predecessor project AI-NURECC which led to the creation of the current project. He conveyed his appreciation of how youth is the focus of the project, in line with the EUSAIR vision.
for their role in shaping the European Cooperation Policy, and his support to the cultural and creative actions of the project. He then concluded with a few suggestions: flexibility and adaptability are needed characteristics to face many uncertainties, and informality as a characteristic compatible with a bottom-up approach. Both these aspects of the project will be useful for the revisions of the EUSAIR strategy in the near future and permissive to new ideas with the eventual integration of the Western Balkans in the EU. He pledged his and his team’s full support for all the efforts foreseen.

Technical wrap-up and next steps, by Stavros Kalognomos, Executive Secretary of the Balkan & Black Sea Commission of the CPMR, AI-NURECC PLUS Coordinator

Mr Kalognomos wrapped-up the session and the event and thanked all participants for their contributions, and kindly invited them to subscribe to the AI-NURECC PLUS Newsletter so that are kept posted on the developments.