

**JOINT DECLARATION**  
**OF THE THIRD TRILATERAL MINISTERIAL MEETING**  
**BETWEEN CROATIA, ITALY AND SLOVENIA**

The Ministers of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Croatia, the Italian Republic and the Republic of Slovenia met in Lužnica near Zagreb on 4 April 2022, to continue their discussions on further enhancing trilateral cooperation following their previous meetings in Trieste in December 2020 and Brdo in April 2021.

The three Ministers strongly condemned Russia's military aggression against Ukraine and sent united messages of solidarity and support to Ukraine and its people. They agreed to step up their political cooperation in this regard within EU, NATO and other multilateral fora.

Pointing out to the risk of raising instability in the Western Balkans, the three Ministers emphasized the importance of avoiding any spill over of the war in Ukraine to the region and of intensifying the efforts aimed at preserving the region's stability while keeping six Western Balkans countries firmly tied to their European path.

The Ministers confirmed their dedication to continued collaboration within this format. They see it as an important platform for linking together three countries in their endeavour to make the North Adriatic area of cooperation, growth and prosperity. They stay committed to further developing partnership between three countries while investing in sustainability of that area and stimulating contacts and cooperation between line ministries, local communities, people and business in their efforts to preserve its unique nature and promote its full potentials in numerous areas.

They welcomed the participation of Croatia and Slovenia in the EUMED as an important framework for addressing joint challenges in the Mediterranean. They reaffirmed their commitment to strengthening cooperation, *inter alia*, within the Adriatic Ionian Initiative, the EU Strategy for the Adriatic and Ionian Region (EUSAIR) and the Central European Initiative (CEI).

The Ministers welcomed the concrete results achieved in the trilateral consultations mechanism structured in the ad hoc working groups on the connectivity, the blue economy and the environmental protection since the last meeting in Brdo, in particular:

- the signing of the North Adriatic Ports Association (NAPA) declaration in Venice on December 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2021;
- the first public demonstration of a quantum, encrypted audio-video communication between three Countries that took place on August 5, 2021 in Trieste, during the Digital Ministers' Meeting of the G20;
- the signing of the Letter of Intent between Slovenia, Croatia and Friuli Venezia Giulia Autonomous Region on March 14, 2022 aimed at the establishment of a dedicated North Adriatic Cross – Border Hydrogen Valley;

- Slovenia formally joining the regional ADRIATICA group on fisheries in September 2021;
- the adoption of the new multiannual management plan of the General Fisheries Commission for the Mediterranean (GFCM) for small pelagics in the Adriatic in November 2021;
- the transformation of the Jabuka/Pomo FRA management regime at the GFCM level from temporary to permanent, in November 2021;
- the kick-off of the program “ North Adriatic Maritime Incident Response System- NAMIRS” on March 31<sup>st</sup>, 2022 which will contribute to strengthened regional cooperation and cross-sectorial coordination on accidental marine pollution.

### Connectivity

The Ministers urged the relevant ports and infrastructure managers that have signed the NAPA Declaration to strengthen their cooperation, also through EU funded projects, in freight transport (e.g. green lines) and to improve infrastructural and intermodal connectivity. The Ministers recognized the importance of Short Sea Shipping and Motorways of the Sea as a part of the Sustainable and Smart Mobility Strategy. They agreed to promote the development of intermodal transport in the Adriatic, with particular focus on maritime and rail transport. The Ministers agreed on the importance of reducing emissions in transport and improving resilience to external shocks or disruptions in supply chains. The Ministers are aware of insufficient/limited road and rail connectivity between Trieste, Rijeka and Koper ports and have agreed to explore the possibilities for improving this situation, including through ongoing TEN-T Regulation revision. The Ministers also stressed the importance of enhanced trilateral cooperation in search and rescue operations based on the International Convention on Maritime Search and Rescue (SAR) and urged the competent Ministries to explore the possibility of enhancing trilateral cooperation in this domain.

### Blue Economy

In order to develop further the cooperation in this area, the Ministers agreed to focus on the topic of “blue skills”, taking advantage of the work carried out in the framework of the EU Strategy for the Adriatic and Ionian Region (EUSAIR) and the tools available in the framework of the Adriatic-Ionian Initiative (AII). In particular, the Ministers agreed to explore the possibility to develop partnership between industry and academia with respect to internship programs dedicated to blue economy sector and to specific activities for updating university curricula to the needs of the industry.

### Environmental Protection

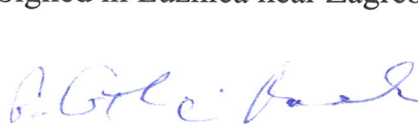
The Ministers confirmed the readiness to continue cooperation and periodical exchange of information on the contribution to targets under the EU 2030 Biodiversity Strategy. Proposed topics include national work under the EU pledge process on protected areas designation, including, when needed, communication on the joint approach to conservation measures (e.g. areas to be designated in Exclusive Economic Zones).

Furthermore, they confirmed cooperation on joint activities in the implementation of marine species conservation measures, prevention of the introduction and spread of invasive alien species as well as continuation of joint monitoring activities for migratory species. All sides will endeavour to strengthen their cooperation on the joint sub-regional approach in the implementation of the Marine Strategy Framework Directive. Recalling the outcomes of “*Ballast Water Management System for Adriatic Sea Protection - BALMAS*” Project, the Ministers emphasized the need for more efficient decision-making on ballast water management, as well as for the establishment of an early warning system in Adriatic ports and monitoring of the ports ecosystem. They welcomed every effort in further harmonization of steps in protection of the extremely vulnerable Adriatic Sea area. The Ministers confirmed the significance of the “*Agreement on the Sub-Regional Contingency Plan for prevention of, preparedness for and response to major marine pollution incidents in the Adriatic Sea*”, and welcomed the work carried out in the framework of the EU Strategy for the Adriatic and Ionian Region (EUSAIR) in this field. They also encouraged efforts in establishing further joint preventive actions at the sub-regional level that can reduce the risk of marine pollution incidents. The Ministers recognize the significance of cross-border hydrogen valleys in boosting energy transition, promoting sectoral integration between transport, industry and the heating sector in an integrated ecosystem, while developing a climate neutral economy and achieving climate goals.

The Ministers will continue encouraging further cooperation in the three areas in the framework of trilateral consultations mechanism. They invited the ad hoc working groups, in particular also their colleagues of the line ministries, to enhance sectorial cooperation in the identified areas and explore possibilities for launching dialogue and regular contacts at their level, so to give additional impetus to the cooperation in this format. Furthermore, the Ministers discussed the possibility of additional areas of joint cooperation, namely on internal affairs. Specific topics will be identified by an ad hoc working group formed by experts of the line ministries.

The next ministerial meeting will take place in Italy.

Signed in Lužnica near Zagreb, 4 April 2022.



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