

## **JOINT DECLARATION ON THE TRILATERAL COOPERATION IN THE NORTH ADRIATIC**

The Ministers of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Croatia, the Italian Republic and the Republic of Slovenia met in Ljubljana on 21 April 2021 to further discuss the perspective of trilateral cooperation based on the previous trilateral meeting held in Trieste on 19 December 2020. Recalling the Joint Statement adopted in Trieste, the Ministers underlined the dramatic economic and social consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic and the importance of regional cooperation to strengthen socio-economic resilience and recovery.

The Ministers welcomed the enhanced trilateral cooperation among the neighbouring EU States in the Adriatic region and stressed once again that the Adriatic Sea is a semi-enclosed sea with a unique coastal landscape and an ecosystem of marine biodiversity that the coastal states have a shared responsibility to protect and promote. Bearing in mind the cooperation of states bordering semi-enclosed seas as enshrined in the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS), they agreed on the importance of jointly addressing the present and future challenges to the protection of the Adriatic Sea and the sustainability of its resources, such as long-term impacts of pollution, climate change and sea level rise, and loss of biodiversity.

In that respect, the Ministers emphasised the need to strengthen trilateral cooperation between the Ministries of their three States, thus cultivating further good neighbourly relations. Such cooperation should be conducted in line with the relevant EU legislation and policies and international agreements to which their respective States are Parties.

They recalled the IMO Traffic Separation Schemes in the North Adriatic, and the arrangements reached within the framework of the Joint Commission for the Protection of the Adriatic Sea and coastal areas against pollution. Furthermore, the Ministers reaffirmed their commitment to unimpeded maritime trade and respect for the freedom of navigation and other freedoms in the Exclusive Economic Zones, including the right to conduct military exercises, in accordance with international law, in particular with the UNCLOS. They also recognised the importance of maritime safety.

The Ministers welcomed the fact that since their meeting in Trieste, the line Ministries have already held trilateral meetings on connectivity, blue economy, and

environmental protection, and positively appraised the discussions held so far. In particular:

#### Connectivity

The three sides agreed to hold a trilateral meeting with representatives of the North Adriatic Ports Association (NAPA) to explore possible actions to strengthen collaboration among ports, also through EU funded projects, in freight transport (e.g., green lines) and to improve infrastructural and intermodal connectivity, also in view of the EUSAIR Transport Masterplan. The three sides also agreed on enhancing joint promotion of the Adriatic cargo and passenger routes as one of the most sustainable modes of transport, especially in combination with railways. They stressed the importance of enhanced trilateral cooperation in search and rescue operations based on the International Convention on Maritime Search and Rescue (SAR) and other relevant international agreements to which all three States are Parties.

#### Blue Economy

The three sides welcomed the list of areas for cooperation to be further developed in the trilateral format. They welcomed Slovenia's interest to join the ADRIATICA group on fishery and agreed to remain seized of the matter. They reiterated the importance of working together on the finalization of the new multiannual management plans for small pelagic and demersal species within the General Fisheries Commission for the Mediterranean (GFCM). Furthermore, the three sides had a preliminary exchange of views on the impact of Exclusive Economic Zones (EEZs) in the Adriatic Sea, once again underlining that fishery activities will continue to be regulated by the EU Common Fisheries Policy. They agreed that the FAO AdriaMed project should continue even in the absence of the European Commission's financial contribution and expressed their intention to keep up their financial support to the project at the current levels.

#### Environmental Protection

The three sides reconfirmed their commitment to the protection of the Adriatic Sea and to intensifying their cooperation in this regard. They discussed the continuation of the Joint Commission for the Protection of the Adriatic Sea's work which produced significant results in the past. The three sides, as EU Member States, will continue to address the challenges stemming from the implementation of the objectives set out in the EU Biodiversity Strategy for 2030, particularly the goal to establish protected areas for at least 30% of sea in Europe, including through designating Natura 2000 sites and networks of protected areas. All sides will endeavour to strengthen their cooperation on the joint sub-regional approach in the implementation of the Marine Strategy Framework Directive. Bearing in mind the

need for integrated and coordinated action in cases of pollution incidents and their prevention, the sides will consider the need to review the Agreement on the Sub-Regional Contingency Plan (for prevention of, preparedness for, and response to major marine pollution incidents in the Adriatic Sea) of 2005 in order to update it, taking into account the current circumstances. All sides wish to further discuss possible activities related to the International Convention for the Control and Management of Ships' Ballast Water and Sediments, 2004 (BWM Convention). The goals of the European Green Deal and our common European goal of making Europe the first climate-neutral continent in the world remain the overarching objectives.

Being fully aware of the economic potential of the North Adriatic in the blue economy, including sustainable maritime and coastal tourism, while taking into consideration the strategic position of the North Adriatic ports in maritime transport networks and their great potential for enhanced cooperation on connectivity, the Ministers agreed to strengthen their trilateral consultation mechanism and to encourage line Ministries to pursue further cooperation in the above-mentioned sectors. They also agreed that in future, trilateral cooperation could include other sectors and confirmed their readiness to engage all the relevant stakeholders whose active support and involvement is crucial for the promotion and protection of the area.

Ad hoc working groups on special topics will discuss common challenges, identify projects and suggest areas of further cooperation. The Ministries of foreign affairs will continue to ensure the coordination of the trilateral cooperation and will consider the proposals presented by the ad hoc working groups in the identified special focus topics. The Ministers agreed to continue meeting on a regular basis, taking into account the developments in the discussions held in the ad hoc working groups.

Signed in Ljubljana, 21 April 2021

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