

6TH ADRIATIC IONIAN YOUTH ORGANISATIONS FORUM

EU OPPORTUNITIES FOR CREATING AN ECOSYSTEM OF INFORMED YOUNG STAKEHOLDERS TO SHAPE THE FUTURE OF THE ADRIATIC IONIAN REGION

15 May 2024

On 15 May 2024, Šibenik (Croatia), Eurelations EEIG, DEMY-Coop Lead Partner, organised the 6th Adriatic Ionian Youth Organisations Forum (AIYOF6) in cooperation with the Adriatic Ionian Euroregion, the Croatian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Adriatic Ionian Initiative. The event took place in the framework of the EUSAIR Annual Forum of the EU Strategy for the Adriatic and Ionian Region (EUSAIR), as organised by the AI/EUSAIR Presidency, and saw the special contribution of the Adriatic Ionian Youth Network (AIYN) and many local youth and youth organisations. The event saw the participation of more than 60 people.



Introduced by **Ms Maria Luisa ESPOSITO**, AIE Project Officer and DEMY-Coop Communication Manager on behalf of Eurelations EEIG, the event was opened by the Euroregion's President, **Mr Nikola Dobroslavić**, also Prefect of the Dubrovnik-Nerevta County and rapporteur at the Committee of the Region (CoR). Mr Dobroslavic stressed the importance of youth engagement in democratic life

and how cooperation across the borders can be key in stimulating positive effects in this field. He highlighted how the DEMY-Coop project takes steps from the results of the youth engagement actions that the Euroregion undertook for 6 years in the framework of the AI-NURECC PLUS initiative, which led to the creation of the first transnational network of youth organisations in Italy and Croatia and in other 8 countries participating in the EUSAIR: the AIYN. The DEMY-Coop project will continue providing Italian and Croatian young people with cooperation and networking opportunities to better understand the role they can have in strategic decision-making and in the EUSAIR.



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Mr **Petar MIŠURA**, Head of EU Department, Town of Šibenik, welcomed the audience on part of the and illustrated some urban requalification projects which will promote youth participation in the Town. The opening session also saw the contribution of various institutions that support the implementation of the EUSAIR. Ms **Lidija PANSEGRAU HADROVIĆ**, Senior National Coordinator, Croatian Ministry of Foreign and EU Affairs, explained how the Croatian Presidency EUSAIR worked to promote the creation of a EUSAIR Youth Council, through coordination and consultation mechanisms, as well as through a specific Call for Expression of Interest that, addressed to all youth aged 18-29 residing in the region, will be useful to constitute the first EUSAIR Youth Council. Mr **Antonio VERRICO**, Italian Presidency of the Council of Ministers, Cohesion Policy Department, and Ms **Simona MAMELI**, Head of Regional Cooperation Section, Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation, corroborated the point and expressed their support for EUSAIR youth activities and policies, underling the role youth can play in supporting the capitalization of the EUSAIR across younger generations.



The second session of the event focused on presenting key EU opportunities accessible to Adriatic and Ionian youth and was moderated by Ms **Mira LEPUR**, Udruga Emedea, DEMY-Coop project partner.

The session saw as first speaker Mr **Gilles KITTEL**, Team Leader, DG REGIO IPA/EUSAIR/Accession Negotiations, European Commission. Mr Kittel explained how DG Regio, as coordinator of the EU macroregional processes,

supports the inclusion of young people through territorial cooperation and through specific initiatives such as AI-NURECC PLUS. Mr Kittel highlighted how the monitoring of territorial cooperation programmes and projects brought to some conclusions as to the importance of engaging young people in decision-making and in planning territorial cooperation policies and programmes. He also added that other possible and pursuable paths for youth actions in the next programming cycle could include support to: capacity building activities aimed at improving the competences and skills of young people and youth organisations involved in ETC and EUSAIR, based on an equal access and on inclusion; the establishment of youth structures (new or existing ones); awareness raising campaigns as well as promotion of participation and empowerment of young people at all stages of design, implementation and projects.



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In line with the Commission's viewpoint, Ms **Maria Luisa ESPOSITO**, AIE Project Officer and DEMY-Coop Communication Manager, presented the DEMY-Coop project as a capitalisation of AI-NURECC PLUS. This small-scale project financed by the Interreg CBC Italy-Croatia Programme in the frame of Cohesion Policy, is facilitating a better cooperation among local and regional government bodies and young people in Italy and Croatia, with a view to overcoming the possible cultural, legal and administrative obstacles to their involvement in strategic decision-making. Ms ESPOSITO stressed the relevance of the DEMY-Coop project to the EUSAIR processes and actions to promote youth engagement and the appropriation of EUSAIR linked opportunity, as well as to raising the awareness of young people and decision-makers about the EUSAIR. Ms ESPOSITO invited the young locals participating in the event to take contact with the DEMY-Coop project in order to receive information on the next steps of the project, which will include the organisation of two Youth Fora in Italy and Croatia.

Mr **Natalino BARBIZZI**, Gear Up! Project Manager, Marche Region, provided an overview of the Gear Up project, an initiative financed under EU Dear Programme, led by the Marche Region and implemented in cooperation with several European partners, among which the Euroregion.

The project was recently kick-started and will foresee financial support to local authorities and civil society organisations in eight EU countries and five IPA countries (seven EUSAIR countries in total) to enhance capacities, exchanges and resources in global citizenship education (GCE), with a particular focus on the achievement of the sustainable development goals. The financial support will in particular be used to activate re-granting processes to involve youth organisations in the targeted countries in promoting ECG actions.

Finally, Mr Brendon **METUSHAJ**, Master Student, Marche Polytechnic University, presented the result of his policy paper, outlining innovative ways to improve the governance structure of the Strategy, including a better flow of information and coordination. Mr METUSHAJ is finishing his master studies as part of the initiatives designed to empower youth and younger generations and financed by the All Permanent Secretariat and the Italian Ministry for Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation.

The third session of the event was organised in the form of the Networking Talks and was moderated by Mr **Benjamin TENDZERIC-KNEZEVIC**, Anthropologist, who introduced the objectives of the session and the speakers. The session was aimed at outlining the main challenges and opportunities faced by youth, taking into account the needs, the challenges and the added value of undertaking joint actions to build future opportunities.

Mr **Milan STOJANOVIC**, (Jr Expert in Circular Economy, Western Balkan Alumni Association) highlighted the significance of introducing Circular Economy (CE) as a transversal topic of the EUSAIR as a facilitator of a closer cooperation with EU neighbouring countries and particularly the Western Balkans. Mr STOJANOVIC presented the results of a study on youth perspectives on the transition to the CE in the Adriatic Ionian Region. The study identified key factors to better encourage youth engagement with circular economy, including among other things access to specific education in the field, paid job opportunities, regional collaboration and involvement in decision-making.



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The study also identified several obstacles to a greater engagement in CE, including a lack of awareness, limited resources, political barriers and resistance from vested interests and individuals.

According to the study, Adriatic Ionian young people believe that their main role in the transition to the circularity is to educate, innovate, advocate, conduct research, collaborate and engage with the community. It is therefore recommended that immediate actions be taken to

ensure the feasibility of CE, including the integration of the circular economy into local government agendas and academic curricula, regional mobility programmes, and the involvement of youth in policy-making.

Ms **Milena PALLOTTA**, (Jr Expert in Cultural and Creative Industries, Giovanichimere) analysed the central role of young people in the multi-sectoral field of Cultural and Creative Industries (CCIs) in the frame of the EUSAIR. Defined as activities and expressions that convey cultural expressions, regardless of their commercial value, CCIs represent a rich diversity of sectors, including arts, media, heritage, crafts and innovation. Ms Pallotta highlighted the pivotal role of young people in revitalising the sector, often facilitated by their direct engagement in third sector organisations and local networks. Young people can inject innovation into traditional creative fields and promote inclusive participation, thereby shaping the future of CCI jobs and communities. To reach this, the recommendations include the development of a unified framework for CCIs, the promotion of collaborative networks between stakeholders and the creation of a cohesive regional market. Furthermore, it is vital to raise awareness and accessibility of policies, opportunities and funding aimed at empowering young talent in the CCI sector. Finally, an international financial mechanism dedicated to supporting CCI and the integration of creativity and entrepreneurship into formal education systems could greatly favour this process.

Mr Daniele SABATO (Jr Expert in Social Digital Innovation and IVY volunteer at AIE) highlighted Social Digital Innovation (SDI) as an opportunity for young people in the Western Balkans region. His research demonstrated how SDI can be leveraged to implement EUSAIR in the Western Balkans, addressing youth-related challenges and increasing youth participation in decision-making processes at the strategic and national levels. Mr SABATO also stressed that the 5th EUSAIR Social Pillar can be an opportunity to elevate the importance of youth IS in public policy. This would enable the creation of social innovation solutions for youth-related challenges and the minimisation of risks associated with digital transition, while facilitating the coordination of the social objectives of EUSAIR with digital policies. Furthermore, initiatives must be developed to bridge the digital dimension gap that plagues the Strategy.



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The recommendations in this field include: to facilitate the growth of a digital dimension within EUSAIR, with clear and operational links to be established with the EU Digital Decade, the Digital Agenda for Europe for the Western Balkans and the funding opportunities of the Digital Europe programme; to promote the digitisation of social enterprises and civil society organisations in the Western Balkans in partnerships with Digital Innovation Hubs present in the region, also with a view to facilitate greater exchange and, at the same time, reduce the risk of skills mismatches between higher education institutions and companies at the regional level; to improve data protection and privacy rights.

Mr Rrahim JATA (Jr Expert in Communication, Let's Do it! Albania) presented the Adriatic Ionian Youth Network (AIYN) as an open, cross-border youth network, committed to ensure deep and broad territorial coverage of the EUSAIR, to stimulate youth appropriation of its goals and opportunities and to propose, structure, design and implement youth-led engagement, advocacy, awareness raising and capacity building actions, also in connection with peers from the other EU Macroregions.

The Network can be a source of information about youth needs and perspectives on EUSAIR-relevant, cross-sectoral and most pressing issues, and thus it is an asset to decision-making at macroregional, national and subnational level. The AIYN participated in the EUSAIR revision process and contributed to the consultations about the establishment of an EUSAIR Youth Council (EYC), as part of the suggestions in the EUSAIR Youth Council Concept Paper.

The top three recommendations for the accomplishment of the process are: to develop tools, practices and activities for achieving a better experience of macroregional processes; to broaden the scope and outreach of macroregional-wide youth engagement actions to marginalized youth; to bring youth engagement processes to the next level and allow youth to participate in programme design, monitoring and evaluation.

Ms Suela TAHIRAJ (Jr Expert in Sustainable Tourism) highlighted how the specific objectives of the EUSAIR IV Pillar, should be adapted them to fast-changing and dynamic industry as well as to the sustainable tourism models. The role of and dialogue with youth in this adaptation and updating process can be key to better achievements, especially when it comes to introducing better quality management and innovation strategies, products and services in the tourism supply chain. Another point would be to work in the domain of rural tourism as well as inclusive tourism.

Last speaker in the panel was **Ms Ana FERNANDES**, who presented her youth organisation Udruga Mladi u EU. The association is involved in the DEMY-Coop project by the local partner Udruga Emedea and will be important in promoting and developing the results of the project.





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