



10 YEARS
ADRIATIC AND IONIAN INITIATIVE

ITALIAN CHAIRMANSHIP
2009-2010

PROTOCOL ON SMALL AND MEDIUM SIZED ENTERPRISES (SMEs) COOPERATION

In the framework of the Adriatic and Ionian Initiative (AII),

the governmental Authorities in charge of SMEs of

the Republic of Albania,

Bosnia and Herzegovina,

the Republic of Croatia,

the Hellenic Republic,

the Italian Republic,

Montenegro,

the Republic of Serbia,

the Republic of Slovenia,

(hereinafter referred to as the Signatories),

- in accordance with the aims stated in article 3, 4 and 9 of the Ancona Declaration adopted at the Conference on Development and Security in the Adriatic and Ionian seas, held in Ancona (Italy) on 19 and 20 May 2000;
- wishing to further strengthen and deepen the economic cooperation by supporting the development of small and medium sized enterprises

(SMEs) in the Adriatic-Ionian area;

- considering that SMEs are the driving engines of economy and prime sources of occupation in the region and may even strengthen social cohesion;
- convinced that special emphasis must be placed on the initiatives aimed at promoting the creation and development of SMEs, through a business oriented approach;
- aware of the strong correlation between progress of science, spreading of innovation, effective competitive conditions in all productive sectors and economic growth;
- aware of the necessity of a close and profitable cooperation among all the institutional actors with competence on SMEs, at the different levels of government, from central authorities to local territories;

have agreed as follows:

1. The present Protocol is aimed at defining a common vision to effectively foster the creation and development of SMEs in the Adriatic-Ionian basin, with the scope that these particular firms reach a higher level of competitiveness and efficiency, both domestically and globally.

2. The Signatories consider strategic the following issues, that could guarantee a shared action with a mid-long term impact and stimulate the sustainable economic growth:

- a) exchange of best practices concerning entrepreneurship and handicraft, SMEs creation and development;
- b) support and active participation in the drafting and submission of cross-border, trans-national and interregional projects, within the policies and programmes implemented by the European Commission and the International Financial Institutions committed in the area;
- c) establishment of a set of services specifically addressed to SMEs (such as “tailored-made” marketing plans, selection of suitable business and institutional partners, business incubators, exhibitions, missions of operators);

- d) transfer of specific expertise from industrial clusters, industrial zones or whole Adriatic cities, through supporting twinning initiatives, with the aim to implement policies capable of fostering human, cultural, material and non-material resources, so that external economies and profitable synergies among SMEs will be generated;
- e) training activities through “learning by cooperating”, in order to acquire new productive, organizational and managerial competences for the mutual exchange of skills and know-how;
- f) support to female entrepreneurship.

3. The International Court of the Adriatic and Ionian Area, organ of the Forum of the Chambers of Commerce of the Adriatic and Ionian Area, which enables disputes to be settled quickly and easily, while respecting the principles of confidentiality and privacy, stands at disposal to all business entities from the Signatories.

4. The Signatories, in coordination with the relevant public authorities from all levels (national, regional, local), will promote basin cooperation as far as possible, and will stimulate effective synergies between public and private stakeholders.

5. Activities promoted by the Signatories will enhance the level of the basin economic activity, in its various components. All cooperation networks at the level of regions, local authorities, chambers of commerce, cities, universities, research centres, business and trade associations will provide concrete inputs for the elaboration of specific cross-border projects.

6. Synergies between SMEs and other social partners should be coordinated with a view to anticipate environmental implications, observing green development standards and making full use of renewable energy sources.

7. In developing concrete projects, public and private stakeholders will rely on the support of the competent National Administrations, in accordance with the existing institutional frameworks, in order to obtain financial contributions from the European Union, as well as from other international sources. Under the present Protocol, no commitments are foreseen for financial support from the Signatories’ national budgets.

8. All projects elaborated in accordance with the present Protocol will be submitted to the AII Council for endorsement. The organisational structure for the implementation of each project will be tailored on the specific interests of participants.

9. The Signatories will encourage the exchange of experiences and best practices and will discuss common efforts, with the assistance of the AII Permanent Secretariat, collecting and disseminating relevant data and information.

10. This Protocol will come into effect at the date of the signature by the Signatories, and will be deposited at the AII Permanent Secretariat in Ancona (Italy).

Signed in Verona, on this 11th day of February in English.

For the Republic of Albania

For Bosnia and Herzegovina

For the Republic of Croatia

For the Hellenic Republic

For the Italian Republic

For Montenegro

For the Republic of Serbia

For the Republic of Slovenia