



The Adriatic-Ionian Initiative

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I. A short historical overview of the Adriatic and Ionian Sea

The Adriatic and the Ionian Sea area is one of the most important maritime regions of the European continent, characterized by a geographical continuity and by the shape of an almost “closed” basin, which opens fanwise towards the central Mediterranean Sea.

Since the prehistoric age, the Region has been an important cultural crossroads for different peoples, who sometimes confronted each other through peaceful “exchanges” and some other through warlike engagements. They often sailed across this sea in search of better fortune in new lands.

The Adriatic and the Ionian Seas were also the scenes of many important historical events and great civilizations set up here during the prehistoric age and in the ancient, middle and modern age.

Through the symbolism of the “Myths”, We are driven to believe the presence of the Cretan people in the Ionian sea and of the Mycaean (the Argonauts!) in the Adriatic Sea and Po Delta, as well as the existence of cultural exchanges, the trade of amber and other metals and a series of interrelations among different cultures.

In ancient times, the colonizers of Magna Graecia, the Dorians in Ancona, and the Corinth’s merchants in Spina, where both the Etruscans and the Illyrians had settled down, though on the other shore of the Adriatic Sea, ruled over the entire Region from the southern Ionian sea to the Upper Adriatic sea.

After this period, the Greek-Roman civilization developed, with a strong influence over these seas. Since the early years of the Byzantine age, both coastal areas of the Adriatic and the Ionian Seas have seen the development of important settlements and cities (*e.g.*, Ravenna, the Ionian coast, the Dalmatian coast, etc.), as well as being the scenes of significant historical events.

Later on, the expansion of the trading and cultural activity of the “Serenissima”, has been determining for the following growth of the entire Region. In relatively more recent times, through the harbour of Trieste, the Adriatic and Ionian Seas became the only passageway towards the Mediterranean Sea for the Austrian Empire.

During the First and the Second World Wars, the area was the scene of violent battles and this has severely limited its recreational and trading activities for the coastal populations.

The well-known post-war condition, the division of Europe into two opposing systems, has not certainly contributed to the recovery of the strategic importance of the Adriatic-Ionian passageway for the coastal countries. The only exception has been the cooperation and intercommunication between Italy and Greece at all levels, further developed after the crisis in the Balkan Peninsula, triggered by the fragmentation of former Yugoslavia.

The coasts of former Yugoslavia and Albania are still today underdeveloped and almost inactive, partially as a consequence of the political instability followed to the continuous wars – for example, the ruinous war in Kosovo, limiting any form of development.

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II. “The Adriatic-Ionian Initiative”

The political and ideological crisis following the dismantling of Berlin Wall, the chaotic situation and the inherent instability due to the fragmentation of former Yugoslavia, the anarchical transition towards the free market economy, with the parallel reinvigoration of the well-rooted hidden hatred among the various ethnic, religious and cultural groups, have produced the well-known troubled and extremely dangerous situation of the Balkan area.

The whole area was affected by a series of ruinous and uncontrollable wars and was strained by pressures of migratory fluxes, as well as by an unbounded increase of crime.

In the attempt of coping with the spreading of the Balkan crisis, and also to correct some wrong actions, the European Union has promoted the so-called “Stability Pact for South Eastern Europe” regarding all the south-eastern European countries, aspiring to join the Union in the future.

Within this treaty, on the occasion of the Finnish EU Summit of October 1999, held in Tampere, the “Adriatic-Ionian Initiative” has been presented by the Italian Government, before being adopted.

“The European Union has strongly encouraged this Italian initiative, made possible by the decisive and active support of another member state of EU, Greece”, as underlined in an interview by former Italian Secretary of Foreign Affairs, Lamberto Dini (in “La Stampa”, 25-5-2000).

The “Adriatic-Ionian Initiative” is based on the idea that international crises are not resolved through violence but through a mutual cooperation among the various peoples, in order to identify and jointly define a range of common interests, in all sectors.

From a modern perspective, these interests are coincident with: security, economics, trade, scientific and technological research and development, environment conservation, and, finally, preservation of cultural heritage and values, which are plentiful in this region.

Within this context, all the Adriatic and Ionian coastal countries have taken part into the Conference of Ancona (19th-20th May 2000), represented by their relevant Secretaries and Ministries of Foreign Affairs, and in the presence of EU representatives, with the objective of defining the guidelines and the procedures for an effective and operative development of the “Adriatic-Ionian Initiative”.

The “Declaration of Ancona” is based upon two main pillars:

- the first pillar, having absolute priority, is related to security and fight against crime in the Region with the mutual cooperation at a government level of all the Adriatic-Ionian Countries through the existing and the newly planned agreements;
- the second pillar is represented by the gradual but systemically programmed development of the Region.

With the intensification of reciprocal relationships – involving national and local administrations, academic institutions, companies, professional associations and the individuals – a close net of common interests will eventually emerge in a gradual but systemic manner: in particular, the reconstruction, infrastructural works, multimodal transportation, migratory fluxes, common organizational and managerial patterns for harbour and maritime activities, the promotion of trade offers and of the common artistic and tourist heritage. All this will include the application of the most up-to-date telecommunication technology.

The “Ancona Declaration” is also supplemented with official texts which pool the results of an early set of guidelines for the Adriatic-Ionian Initiative, produced within the Conference by the relevant working groups.

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With regard to "Interuniversity Cooperation", the universities, the higher education institutions in general and the centres of excellence of the Adriatic-Ionian Region are called to contribute to the restoration, conservation and promotion of the cultural heritage and to promote the development of science and technology within common educational and research programs in a joint initiative of transnational cooperation.

- The coordination and promotion of the «Interuniversity Cooperation» is entrusted to a permanent «Network of the Adriatic-Ionian Universities», denominated "UNIADRION".

- To the final text of the document two substantial points have been added:

1. The first underlines that "Universities, the other higher education institutions and the centres renew their efforts also in the activities related to other round tables".

2. The second point considers that the role of universities is determining "in the encouragement of a sustainable economic development"

In other words, the modern concept of sustainable development wants the University to interact with the territory. In this case, the same concept is extended to all Universities of the Adriatic-Ionian basin, which interact with the whole territory of the bordering countries.

As a matter of fact, the university community can contribute to the development of the Region both with scientific-based proposals and/or with the offer of technical expertise and technological support in the phase of projecting and realization. An example for all the other universities has been represented by the initiatives promoted by the University of Bologna and the University of Ancona, which have organized a Conference in Ravenna (15th-16th December 2000) in order to further discuss and apply the guidelines of the Adriatic-Ionian Initiative, as defined in the Conference of Ancona.

III. The Conference of Ravenna

Under the initiative of the Universities of Bologna and Ancona, the Conference of Ravenna was held on 15th - 16th of December 2000, with the participation of all the Countries involved, (including Serbia and Montenegro), mainly at a university representative level.

The Conference of Ravenna has not only focused on the foundation of the Interuniversity Community and on the institution of the "UNIADRION" network, which were the primary objectives, but it has also extended its concern to the definition of guidelines for effective proposals and operative strategies. The intention was the elaboration of a series of operative policies regarding almost the entire range of actions for development, as programmed in the «Ancona Declaration», except for the aspects related to "security and fight against criminality".

The Conference has revealed to be successfully, thanks to the wide participation of member countries and the effective intention by all participants to operatively contribute to the achievement of the objectives programmed in the Declaration of Ravenna.

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