

**JOINT DECLARATION**  
**OF THE FOURTH 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 Ancona on 10 July 2023, to further deepen their cooperation focused on the North Adriatic, building up on the excellent results so far achieved thanks to this trilateral format.

The Ministers warmly welcomed Croatia's accession to the Schengen Area and the Eurozone on January 1<sup>st</sup> 2023, and Slovenia's election as non-permanent member of the UN Security Council for the years 2024-2025.

The Ministers condemned in the strongest terms the ongoing unprovoked and unjustified military aggression of the Russian Federation against Ukraine. Expressing their unwavering solidarity with Ukraine and its people, they reiterated full support to the country's sovereignty, independence, unity and territorial integrity, within its internationally recognised borders, including territorial waters. The Ministers stressed the need for continued international support and assistance to Ukraine, including in the areas of recovery, post-war reconstruction, and accountability. Recognising the importance of comprehensive mine action, as a precondition for social and economic revitalisation of Ukraine, the Ministers welcomed organisation of the International Donor Conference on Humanitarian Demining in Ukraine, that will take place in October 2023 in Zagreb, Croatia.

Underlining the strategic importance of the Western Balkan region for the future of the European Union, the Ministers emphasized the need for all countries in the region to accelerate on the EU path by engaging on ambitious reform agendas. They reiterated their shared and firm support to the integration process of the Western Balkans, including by implementing concrete measures for accelerated and gradual integration in line with and building on the 2020 revised methodology on enlargement. They called on the European Union to step up its role and contribution in order to increase Western Balkans countries' resilience to the current challenges, including effectively countering illegal migration.

Stressing the key role played by regional cooperation, the Ministers welcomed the ambitious Programme of Croatia's Chairmanship/Presidency of the Adriatic and Ionian Initiative and the EU Strategy for the Adriatic and Ionian Region (EUSAIR) as a great opportunity to strengthen further their cooperation in regional fora and organizations. Furthermore, they welcomed the designation of Trieste as host city of the "Big Science Business Forum" on October 1-4, 2024 as a concrete opportunity to strengthen the cooperation among their respective research infrastructures on technology and industry.

The Ministers stressed their commitment to enhance further the cooperation carried out through this trilateral format as a catalyser for promoting growth, prosperity and sustainability in the North Adriatic area. Developing partnership among local communities,

people and business will continue to guide their efforts to preserve its unique nature and promote its full potentials in numerous areas.

Taking note of the agreement between Croatia and Italy on the delimitation of their Exclusive Economic Zones (EEZ) signed on May 24, 2022, the Ministers reiterated their commitment to cooperate closely in order to address the present and future challenges to the protection of the Adriatic Sea and the sustainability of its resources, as enshrined in the UN Law of the Sea Convention (UNCLOS), including its Part IX on enclosed or semi-enclosed seas, as well as in accordance with applicable EU legislation. 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 UNCLOS and relevant international agreements.

The Ministers recognised the importance of maritime safety, recalled the IMO Traffic Separation Schemes in the North Adriatic, and other international agreements concluded in between Adriatic States, including those in the field of ship reporting, VTS and SAR, and stressed the need for their potential upgrading. In this respect, the Ministers welcomed the initiative to carry out a joint multipurpose maritime exercise in September 2023, with the objective to test and improve the cooperation and coordination between the competent authorities for SAR operations and test the situational awareness and the use of communication systems/channels between the authorities when performing joint SAR operations.

The Ministers welcomed the progress made in the implementation of the transnational project “North Adriatic Hydrogen Valley” between Slovenia, Croatia and Friuli Venezia Giulia Autonomous Region, including towards the signature of a €25 million grant agreement with the European Commission.

The Ministers welcomed further positive developments registered since their last meeting in Lužnica, Croatia (Annex I), and, based on the activities of the working groups, welcomed the following proposals for the way forward:

#### Connectivity

Noting with satisfaction the concrete steps in the dialogue between NAPA ports towards strengthening the cooperation on common challenges such as decarbonisation, energy efficiency and digitalisation in ports, the Ministers welcomed the intention of the association to continue to work together on a Strategic Study on the re-positioning of NAPA in the international strategic context and considering the impact of the Russia/Ukraine conflict. Taking note of the several projects ideas and initiatives currently under consideration to address common challenges and contribute towards achieving the objectives of the European Maritime Space concept and Sustainable and Smart Mobility Strategy, the Ministers expressed their support for further development and discussion within this trilateral framework of projects that will promote or establish intermodal connections between Slovenia, Croatia and Italy for both passenger and freight transport. The Ministers reaffirmed the importance to carry on with activities, which will lead towards reduction of greenhouse gas emissions in all modes of transport and improve resilience to

external shocks or disruptions in supply chains. In the light of the forthcoming adoption of the new TEN-T Regulation the Ministers note there shall be new opportunities for improved trilateral cooperation along the new TEN-T Corridor “Western Balkans – East Mediterranean”.

### Blue Economy

The Ministers reiterated the importance of working together on the implementation of the existing multiannual management plans for small pelagic and demersal species in the Adriatic within the General Fisheries Commission for the Mediterranean (GFCM). With regard to the Exclusive Economic Zones (EEZs) of Croatia and Italy, they confirmed that fishery activities remain regulated by the rules of EU Common Fisheries Policy. Based on the results already achieved in this area, the Ministers took note that discussions on fishery will continue in the framework of the ADRIATICA group, including continuing cooperation with regard to exchange of data in line with the Control Regulation 1224/2009 and its Implementing Regulation 404/2011 for the establishment of exchange of fisheries data via so-called FLUX standard, as well as cooperation regarding implementation of research surveys at sea such as MEDIAS, Solemon and MEDITS surveys that are implemented in the EU Data Collection Framework on the basis of Regulation 2017/1004. Taking stock of the on-going projects on blue skills in the INTERREG programs and in the existing multilateral frameworks, the Ministers agreed to explore possible support for strengthening the cooperation between their respective national authorities/bodies, as well as universities, on the creation of attractive career opportunities in fields related to sustainable blue economy.

### Environmental Protection

Recalling the COP 23 Barcelona Convention on 4-8 December 2023 in Portorož, Slovenia, the Ministers agreed on the importance of and the urgent need to protect and restore marine ecosystems in line with the Kunming Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework and the EU 2030 Biodiversity Strategy. Further work is necessary on the joint efforts for conservation measures in areas to be designated in Exclusive Economic Zones for the protection of biodiversity. Confirming the importance of further work on joint monitoring activities for migratory species including prevention of introduction and establishment of Invasive Alien Species (IAS), the Ministers welcomed efforts on harmonization of steps for the protection of the Adriatic Sea. Recalling the outcomes of the ‘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 encouraged efforts in establishing further joint cooperation at the technical level in this field. 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). Furthermore, they recalled the arrangements reached within the framework of the Joint Commission for the Protection of the Adriatic Sea and coastal areas against pollution and encouraged discussion on the continuation of its works. They also welcomed further effort in the development of the draft Adriatic Sub Regional Oil Spill Contingency Plan and the work carried so far by REMPEC.

## Home Affairs

Aware of the migratory pressure along the Western Balkans route, which Croatia, Italy and Slovenia face, the trilateral cooperation will be further strengthened when it comes to the enhancement of joint patrols' activities and their modalities; the improvement of readmission procedures; the reinforcement of information exchange, including for investigation purposes; the coordination of national positions in the competent institutional bodies of the European Union. The shared path of cooperation will also continue in the areas of common interest, such as the fight against transnational organised crime, with a particular focus on migrant smuggling networks, trafficking of human beings, drug trafficking and cybercrime, as well as the development of shared approaches in preventing and combatting terrorism and violent extremism.

The Ministers will continue encouraging further cooperation in the four 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 continue giving sustained impetus to the cooperation in this format.

The next ministerial meeting will take place in Slovenia.

Signed in Ancona, 10 July 2023.

Gordan Grlić Radman

Antonio Tajani

Tanja Fajon

Minister of Foreign and  
European Affairs

Deputy Prime Minister and  
Minister of Foreign Affairs  
and International  
Cooperation

Deputy Prime Minister and  
Minister of Foreign and  
European Affairs

Republic of Croatia

Italian Republic

Republic of Slovenia

## **ANNEX TO THE JOINT DECLARATION OF THE FOURTH TRILATERAL MINISTERIAL MEETING BETWEEN CROATIA, ITALY AND SLOVENIA**

Concrete advancements since the meeting in Lužnica, Croatia (2022):

- The activities carried out by the NAPA ports association during the Italian presidency, resulting in increased visibility of the association through the active participation in the Connecting Europe Days 2022 in Lyon and the contribution to the revision of the TEN-T Regulation 1315/2013 on “Union guidelines for the development of the Trans-European Transport network”;
- The successful completion by Sept. 30, 2023 of the “EUREKA” project for the creation of a permanent platform for cross border cooperation on maritime safety;
- The successful conclusion of the EU-funded project “SUSPORT” with the conference “Decarbonisation and digitalization of ports and freight transport. The contribution of EU territorial cooperation” held in Trieste on June 21, 2023;
- The signature on June 21, 2023 of the Protocol for enhancing ports environmental sustainability and energy efficiency to the SUSPORT project, by Italian, Croatian and Slovenian representatives of ports and port authorities, pledging to keep a high-level of interest on future cooperation, with the aim at improving ports environmental sustainability and energy efficiency;
- The start of a new connectivity project SUSTANCE, funded by the Interreg-Central Europe, with the aim of establishing a new direct passenger experimental train connection along the cross- border route Trieste Villa Opicina – Pivka – Šapjane – Rijeka, promoting the use of sustainable public transport solutions and improving cross-border connectivity in Central Europe;
- The establishment of the Maritime Safety Permanent Transnational Network, which held its 1st meeting on June 30, 2023;
- The first trilateral meeting of their respective Chiefs of National Police which took place in Rome, on June 6, 2023;
- The successful organisation of the “2023 EMRA Workshop” (EU-funded Marine Robotics and Applications) held in Šibenik on June 19-21, 2023, within the framework of Interreg ADRION MARBLE and Horizon UWIN-LABUST projects, as well as Interreg Italy-Croatia InnovaMare project, and endorsed by the Croatian 2023-2024 EUSAIR Presidency.