

ADRIATIC - IONIAN INITIATIVE

Sustainable Development of the Adriatic and Ionian Seas region – environmental aspects

Description of Initiative.

The Adriatic-Ionian Initiative (AII) was formally established as a political initiative at a conference held in Ancona, Italy in May 2000. Seven Countries cooperate within the framework of AII: Albania, Bosnia & Herzegovina, Croatia, Greece, Italy, Slovenia and Serbia & Montenegro.

The aim of AII is to link the coastal Countries of the two seas for the purpose of cooperating in the development and safety of the whole area. The issue of environmental protection which is central for socio economic development in the subregion is the high sensitivity of the maritime and coastal areas of the closed Adriatic Sea.

Currently (from May 2003 to May 2004) Slovenia holds the Presidency of AII and it is planned that Monte Negro will take over the presidency for next term.

One of the six round tables that are active in the framework of AII is the *Round Table on Environmental Protection and Sustainable Development*. In this framework a document called the *Adriatic Action Plan (AAP)* was adopted at the environmental ministers' meeting in June 2003 in Zadar, Croatia. The Adriatic Action Plan aims to link together the AII Countries in efforts to reduce the negative impacts of human activities in the Adriatic-Ionian basin. Due to the closed nature of the two seas and increasing pressures on the environment from economic activities, negative pressures are increasing and becoming an ever more serious threat to the sustainable development of the region.

Initiative or more specifically the *Round Table on Environmental Protection and Sustainable Development* links together the countries that in spite of the fact that they are situated in the Adriatic and Ionian region have different cultural, political and economic background but are still dedicated to the same goal - sustainable development of the Adriatic and Ionian Seas.

Approach is also innovative from the aspect that three countries declare the North Adriatic as a single water body (same approach is also envisaged in the EU Water Framework Directive) – because of its sensitivities and simultaneously growing pressures from human activities.

Work which should result in stated goals is planned and already is linking together other AII Round tables: economy, tourism and small and medium enterprises cooperation; transport and maritime cooperation; culture; education and inter-university cooperation.

Three projects (presented later on) are in the heart of the environmental aspect of the AII. Approach is innovative as the project links together (in the first phase) three North Adriatic AII member states that are more advanced institutionally and have obliged themselves to complete the aims as soon as possible. Other states have agreed to join and follow the projects in their extended phases or to learn from them in following years.

CAMP (Coastal Area Management Programme) Slovenia - Integrated Coastal Zone Management (see item II) as one of three core projects is the umbrella for other development activities and programmes on the AII coastal area and the sea. The financial contributions for the implementation are structured as follows: 30% regional body (Mediterranean Action Plan),

30% governmental (Slovenia) contribution and 40% local communities and private sector in the area (mainly Port of Koper (public (app. 50%) private (app. 50%) ownership company) as actor of main economic activities in the area).

Mainstreaming / Sustainability.

Three projects were that are supported as key projects:

I. Contingency plan for the Adriatic

Fast growing Marine transport in semi-enclosed Adriatic Sea represents additional and growing pressures and threats to marine environment. Within the framework of the AII, Slovenia, Italy and Croatia have agreed to commence activities for developing a Sub-regional Contingency Plan for the Northern Adriatic, to be coordinated by the Regional Marine Pollution Emergency Response Centre for the Mediterranean Sea (REMPEC/IMO/UNEP). Countries involved expect that results will significantly improve sub-regional cooperation in the prevention of, and response to, maritime pollution from shipping, which will be a big step forward towards sustainable development.

II. Strategic Environmental Assessment of Maritime Activities Including Ballast Water Issue

The introduction of invasive marine species into new environments by ships ballast water, attached to ships hulls and via other vectors has been identified as one of the four greatest threats to the seas.

The Adriatic Action Plan thus foresees the implementation of preventive activities related to the introduction of ballast water into the Adriatic ecosystem, including the use of mechanisms defined in the Protocol on Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA, Kiev, 21 May 2003).

III. Integrated Coastal Zone Management

The coastal area is under very heavy pressure because of fast growing urbanisation, various economic land based and marine activities, including tourism, with serious negative impacts on marine environment.

In order to implement sustainable development, the Adriatic Action Plan recommends to the governments of coastal states that they use the method of Integrated Coastal Zone Management (EU Recommendation ICZM/2002/413/EC). The starting point for the ICZM approach is that land developers take into account the stress and impacts their plans could have for the coast and the maritime ecosystem, and to propose developmental solutions suitable to the situation. The project takes as its basis the measures to reduce pressures from land and maritime activities that affect the maritime ecosystem. This is also the starting point for the development of the shared Adriatic water body. Such an approach is extremely beneficial to all coastal states, as it takes into consideration the renewability of the maritime ecosystem and its natural resources, and establishes the principles and standards of sustainable development both in the field of the use of physical space and individual economic activities on the shared sea.

CAMP project as a case and as coordinating project is to be implemented (in Slovenia as a case to be followed) through a) National Environmental Programme, b) National Strategy on Spatial Planning, c) National Water Act and d) Nature Protection Act.

Activities which should mainstream the project are coordinated from Regional Development Agency (established and financed by local communities). A special attention will be given also to the preservation of biodiversity and the integrity of Adriatic marine ecosystems.

Slovenian presidency of the AII aims to promote and perform the three listed projects for they link together actors, as well as integrate policies for the marine and coastal environment, which is simultaneously the very substance of the proposed EU Marine Strategy (COM (2002) 539 final). Slovene minister of the environment has also reported on these activities to the EU Environmental Council (22. 12. 2004) as they link together regional needs and goals with EU policy and strategies.

Replicating the Initiative

All three projects are initially started by three North Adriatic countries and others have agreed to follow or join as soon as possible.

Lessons learned during the development of the projects are many:

- extremely important is the role / assistance of regional bodies (in this case UNEP/MAP secretariat) and its regional bodies (REMPEC) are crucial) for balanced and concerted approach on subregional level
- to address the problem on subregional level is of extreme importance because of unique natural, economical and political conditions
- regional body (UNEP/MAP) is recognised as a body which acts as a catalyst among governments, local authorities and NGOS for effective implementation of common goal (sustainable development of the region)

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