

Joint Declaration

Italy and Croatia held the fifth meeting of the Coordination Committee of Ministers on 24 May 2022 in Rome. The meeting took place in the framework of the celebrations for the 30th anniversary of diplomatic relations between the two countries. Over the past 30 years, Croatia and Italy have built a solid, wide-ranging and ambitious cooperation, firmly anchored to EU values and NATO alliance. The two sides praise the respective autochthonous minorities for their strategic contribution to the bilateral relations and confirmed their commitment to support further progress in implementing national, European and international laws, to the benefit of both minorities.

Acknowledging that Next Generation EU is an unprecedented opportunity for all EU Member States, Italy and Croatia will explore possibilities of economic cooperation in delivering the strategic priorities of their National Recovery and Resilience Plans (NRRPs). COVID-19 pandemic and aggression on Ukraine underlined the need for additional public investment to ensure strong recovery and sustainable growth in the EU, making it more resilient and capable/equipped to deal with different challenges. The two sides will exploit coordinated action in that area.

Italy and Croatia condemn Russia's premeditated, unprovoked, unjustified and brutal war of aggression against Ukraine and reiterate our unwavering support for the independence, sovereignty and territorial integrity of Ukraine within its internationally recognised borders. We demand that Russia immediately and unconditionally cease its military actions and withdraw all its troops and equipment from the entire territory of Ukraine. We strongly urge Russia to cease its unjustified and unprovoked attacks and to provide urgently safe pathways, both for civilians to evacuate to other parts of Ukraine, as well as for those delivering humanitarian assistance. Italy and Croatia stand by the people of Ukraine as well as the representatives of its democratically elected institutions and call for an immediate stop to the suffering of civilians and the destroying of cities.

The two sides emphasize the importance of avoiding any spill over of the war in Ukraine to Western Balkans and reiterate their steadfast commitment to the security and stability of the region. Italy and Croatia firmly support the need to re-energize the European integration process of the Western Balkans as a key geo-strategic investment for the European Union and call for immediate start of the accession negotiations with North Macedonia and Albania. Italy and Croatia deeply regret the prolonged political crisis in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Leaders in Bosnia and Herzegovina need to demonstrate a strong commitment to finalise swiftly the constitutional and electoral reform, vital for stability and full functionality of the country, as well as to support all other priority reforms set out in the Commission's Opinion to obtain a candidate status. Italy and Croatia fully support the EU-facilitated Dialogue between Serbia and Kosovo and call on both sides to negotiate with a constructive approach, in line with their legitimate aspirations to join the European Union. Furthermore, the two sides stress the importance to strengthen regional cooperation by supporting, inter alia, within the Adriatic Ionian Initiative, the EU Strategy for the Adriatic and Ionian Region (EUSAIR) and the Central European Initiative (CEI).

The Ministers reaffirm their commitment to strengthening the cooperation on the North Adriatic in the trilateral format including Slovenia, as a strategic platform for spurring inclusive growth and sustainable prosperity in the area. Recalling the trilateral declaration signed in Lužnica, Croatia on 4 April 2022, they hail the progress already achieved and underline the need to exploit fully the potential of this trilateral framework.

While welcoming Croatia's participation in the EUMED as an important framework for addressing joint challenges in the Mediterranean, Italy reiterates its support to Croatia's accession to the Schengen area, Eurozone and OECD. Croatia takes note of and looks favourably on Rome's candidature for hosting the EXPO 2030, and stands ready for further consultations.

The Ministers welcome the concrete steps taken by the two sides to strengthen their bilateral cooperation on the basis of the joint declaration signed in Zagreb on 30 November 2020, in particular: the organization of the first bilateral Business Forum back-to-back with the meeting of the Coordination Committee of Ministers; the adoption of the new Executive Programme on culture and education for 2022-2026, signed in Venice on 23 April 2022; the signature of the agreement for the delimitation of their respective Exclusive Economic Zones in the Adriatic Sea and the upcoming signature of Memorandum of Understanding on cooperation in the fight against illicit trafficking in drugs and psychotropic substances to be signed during a next meeting in Zagreb.

While reaffirming their intention to implement along the lines agreed at the IV meeting of the Coordination Committee of Ministers in health and tourism sectors, the two sides agree to operationalise their bilateral cooperation as follows:

Agriculture and Fisheries

1. Jointly work, in the context of European policies, on the promotion of the new food labeling rules in the framework of healthy and balanced life style, that need to be informative and objective;
2. Continue close cooperation within the "ADRIATICA" Regional Group of General Directors of Sea Fishing as the ideal framework for collaboration and for the pursuit of the best-shared strategies, aimed at guaranteeing the long-term sustainability of fisheries from an environmental, economic and social point of view;
3. Identify new and effective management measures for shared fish stocks, in particular with regard to pelagic and demersal species as to ensure the pursuit of the objectives set within both the European Union and the General Fisheries Commission for the Mediterranean (GFCM), replicating the method already adopted in the establishment of the permanent Fisheries Restricted Area (FRA) Jabuka/Fossa di Pomo by involving fishing sector and scientific institutions;

Culture

1. Develop the full potential of bilateral cooperation in the cultural field through the implementation of the new Executive Programme for the period 2022-2026 in all agreed operational areas;

2. Support the Conference of Ministers of Culture of the Euro-Mediterranean region (Naples, 16-17 June) - the first Ministerial meeting for Culture of the Southern Partnership of the European Union - as an opportunity to strengthen EU support for the cultural world in the region of Mediterranean;
3. Cooperate in the field of film co-production and development of co-production projects among national film centers of the Mediterranean, Central European and South-Eastern European countries, and support their closer regional cooperation;
4. Enhance joint initiatives and partnerships that aim at valorizing and promoting material and immaterial cultural heritage, in particular in the context of UNESCO transnational heritage sites and within the EU's Creative Europe Program.

Economic Growth

1. Cooperate on pharmaceutical industry, taking advantage of the opportunities offered by the "ENEA Tech and Biomedical" Foundation for supporting investments in research and technology transfer activities, promoting collaboration between SMEs, innovative start-ups and universities, and more generally between scientific research and private sector;
2. Build stronger links and facilitate opportunities for Italian and Croatian business communities to foster bilateral trade and identify opportunities in the fields of research and innovation, technology, digitalization, and cyber. Work to strengthen cooperation between universities, the academic community, industry, and the Government;
3. Enhance closer coordination in the context of European policies, with particular reference to the "Fit for 55 Package", seeking common positions in order to mitigate the impact that these measures may have on the competitiveness of the industrial system, affecting key sectors of European industry, with implications also on the social dimension;
4. Promote opportunities for more Italian investments in Croatia especially in the areas affected and damaged by earthquakes, taking advantage of the programs launched by the Croatian government.
5. Cooperate to create an optimal environment for further bilateral trade, working on strengthening bilateral economic cooperation, exchanging information concerning the business development of the two countries, recognizing the potential for cooperation and strengthening the overall mutual relations in areas of common interest for the development of the industry, especially in the areas of steel making and shipbuilding industry.

Green transition/Environment

1. Maintain energy safety standards as required by European regulations and their implementation in national laws by promoting joint cross-border actions relating to the monitoring and control of offshore plants and infrastructures on the seabed (also through studies and research on issues relating to persistent natural phenomena in the Adriatic area), as well as engaging in joint operations for the prevention of major accidents through on-site exercises;

2. Collaborate on the harmonization of their regulatory framework on decommissioning or reusing of offshore infrastructures in order to promote the collaboration on future strategic planning or decarbonisation and use of existing natural gas infrastructure into infrastructures that can transport alternative energy sources on safety of offshore upstream installations as well as the decommissioning and reuse of offshore platform (such as off shore wind projects, CCS potential etc.);
3. Promote and strengthen cooperation in the establishment of the North Adriatic Cross-Border Hydrogen Valley with the purpose of creating opportunities and utilizing the potential of hydrogen technologies through developing joint innovative projects to be funded by national or European funds in order to secure the value chain from hydrogen production to use.
4. Identify through a technical working group some best practices for possible future exploration or exploitation activities in area straddling the line of their respective Economic Exclusive Zones, respecting co-existence of different uses of the maritime space in order to ensure consistency with other relevant Union policies such as the European Biodiversity Strategy and the Common Fisheries Policy;
5. Promote the strategic role of small islands in the decarbonisation path as innovative laboratories for the development of clean energy projects through the exchange of best practices and the development of joint sectorial initiatives;
6. Continue close cooperation on national work under the EU pledge process on protected areas designation, including, when needed, joint approach on conservation measures (e.g. areas to be designated in Exclusive Economic Zones) as contribution to targets under EU 2030 Biodiversity Strategy. Furthermore, cooperation on joint activities in implementation of conservation measures and monitoring activities for marine species, including prevention of introduction and spread of invasive alien species.
7. Promote a more efficient decision-making process on ballast water management based on the outcomes of “Ballast Water Management System for Adriatic Sea Protection – BALMAS” Project, as well as the establishment of an early warning system in Adriatic ports and monitoring of the ports ecosystem;
8. Encourage efforts in establishing further joint preventive actions at the sub-regional level that can reduce the risk of marine pollution incidents, taking into account the “Agreement on the Sub-Regional Contingency Plan for prevention of, preparedness for and response to major marine pollution incidents in the Adriatic Sea”, as well as the work carried out in the framework of the EU Strategy for the Adriatic and Ionian Region (EUSAIR);

Home Affairs

1. Establish a "Joint Security Strategic Committee" with the aim of:
 - a) Jointly identify and assess common threats and challenges to the security of the two countries, with a particular (but not exclusive) focus on cooperation on migration, fight against transnational organized crime, drug trafficking, anti-terrorism;
 - b) Identify areas in which it is necessary to strengthen strategic cooperation also through the planning of initiatives and actions to be implemented jointly;
 - c) Promote the exchange of methods, good practices and expertise in order to prevent the most serious forms of crime, including emerging ones;

- d) Promote and evaluate activities useful for strengthening police collaboration also in consideration of emergencies and critical issues that may affect public, safety or state border;
- e) Optimize bilateral synergies on issues to be addressed within the EU and multilateral fora.

Research and Education

- 1. Strengthen further the bilateral cooperation in the areas of higher education and mobility;
- 2. Finalize and implement the new Executive Programme for Scientific and Technological Cooperation for 2023-2025;
- 3. Advance cooperation within the Erasmus+ Programme;
- 4. Strengthen further the bilateral cooperation in scientific R&D, especially in the strategic areas as cross-border cooperation and satellite quantum-secured communication within the EuroQCI cluster of the European quantum communication infrastructure;

Transport and Infrastructure

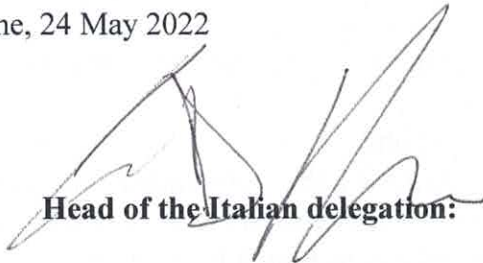
- 1. Strengthen the maritime dimension of the bilateral collaboration, with particular regard to the development of the ports of both countries also through the implementation of an efficient and sustainable network and promote the development of short sea shipping, also in the framework of the future new concept of the European maritime space and with the advisable help of co-financed projects;
- 2. Enhance cooperation in the field of maritime safety and the protection of the marine environment, and propose solutions for the improvement of the safety of maritime traffic in the Adriatic Sea;
- 3. Identify potential joint initiatives in order to improve infrastructures dedicated to dual use (civilian and military) through the assessment of development projects, if needed;
- 4. Explore opportunities for improving connections between Italy and Croatia, through the ongoing TEN-T Regulation revision process, focusing on further enhancement of cooperation among northern Adriatic ports;
- 5. Support the inclusion of the Adriatic – Ionian corridor into the network of European Transport Corridors, taking into consideration the prerogatives of the Member States/third countries involved in terms of investments and decision planning.

Telecommunication

- 1. Resolve remaining interference in order to facilitate the implementation of wireless broadband communications in the harmonised 700 MHz spectrum band and to ensure future interference free operation of television and 5G networks in UHF band (470 – 790 MHz), as well as to resolve Italian interference to Croatian FM stations along the Croatian coast;
- 2. Continue good cooperation in preparation of new DAB plan and agreement within Adriatic and Ionian region in order to resolve Italian interference and ensure future interference free operation in VHF III band.

In view of the next meeting of the Coordination Committee of Ministers to be held in Croatia, the two sides will carry out a periodic review of the activities agreed above via focal points in the line ministries. The two Ministries of Foreign Affairs will coordinate an assessment of the achievements on a regular basis.

Rome, 24 May 2022



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