



Press release

EUSALP presidency handed over to Slovenia following productive year

19 October 2023

As its year at the head of EUSALP comes to a close, Switzerland passed the baton today in Bad Ragaz (canton of St Gallen) to Slovenia, which will take charge of the European Union (EU) macroregional strategy in 2024. The Confederation and the cantons, which have jointly held the presidency in 2023, looked back on a successful year at the Annual Forum and General Assembly organized in conjunction with the Canton of St Gallen.

The symbolic handover was attended by State Councillor Markus Dieth of Aargau, President of the Conference of Cantonal Governments, Marko Štucin, Slovenian State Secretary for European affairs and State Secretary of the Federal Department of Foreign Affairs Alexandre Fasel.

Cooperation between different levels of government and across national borders is essential when it comes to facing up to challenges such as climate change and the energy transition. Markus Dieth stressed that EUSALP, the macroregional EU Strategy for the Alpine Region, makes this kind of concerted approach possible: “The cantons know the importance of fostering close relations with neighbouring regions and countries and working together with other European states.”

Strengthening EUSALP

The joint presidency of the Confederation and the cantons set out to strengthen EUSALP by setting clear priorities. This process is now under way. Throughout 2023, there has been continual dialogue between institutions as well as with business leaders, academics and representatives of civil society. Conferences focused on specific themes were organized in the various language regions. There were many opportunities to share real-world experiences and deepen cooperation within the Alpine region.

The need to work together in order to save resources and fight climate change was acknowledged at the first conference of the year on 31 March in Fribourg. The theme of that conference was the circular economy, which is based on sharing, reusing, recycling and repairing.

Climate change is also having an impact on the Alpine water cycle, revealing just how vital it is. This was highlighted at the conference held in Scuol (canton of Graubünden) on 16 June. Attendees held in-depth discussions on water management. Water is at once an agricultural resource, a source of energy, an asset for

tourism and an integral part of our environmental heritage, and solutions are needed that reconcile these disparate interests. A delegation from the EUSALP Youth Council reiterated this point at the meeting in Lausanne on 8 September.

On 1 September, EUSALP met in Lugano (canton of Ticino) to discuss sustainable mobility. There is no shortage of challenges in the Alpine region: goods transportation, cross-border commuter traffic, the needs of remote regions and tourism. Innovative solutions aligned with the goal of achieving net zero carbon dioxide emissions by 2050 were proposed at the conference.

The Bad Ragaz Declaration

The cantons that hosted events organized under the Swiss presidency reported on their progress at the Annual Forum on 19 October. State Councillor Marc Mächler of St Gallen was emphatic: “We must all seize the opportunity presented by the strengthening of cooperation between the Alpine regions and states and back it up with concrete activities and projects. We also need to embed EUSALP more effectively in political circles.”

A joint declaration was then adopted by the General Assembly. Echoing the *Bad Ragaz Decision* of 2012, which marked the birth of the macroregional Strategy, the new 2023 Bad Ragaz Declaration is intended as a springboard for the process of revising the EUSALP action plan and a commitment to strengthening the Strategy’s governance.

The signatories call for closer cooperation to overcome the increasingly urgent challenges with regard to climate, biodiversity and energy, and they express their solidarity with populations affected by recent natural disasters. The declaration also advocates involving the Youth Council more in EUSALP’s activities and reaching out to cities, towns and local communities.

This year marked the first time in EUSALP’s history that a non-EU member state took over the presidency. Switzerland has been a member of the Strategy since its inception, along with six other countries (Austria, France, Germany, Italy, Liechtenstein and Slovenia) and 48 regions, including all Swiss cantons. EUSALP aims to bolster cooperation between these and to identify common goals.