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2021 ANNUAL GENERAL ASSEMBLY

On 15 July 2021, the members of the CPMR Balkan & Black Sea Commission held their Annual General Assembly online, due to the pandemic restrictions.

Mr Horia Teodorescu, President of Tulcea County Council (Romania) was successfully and unanimously elected for a two-year term, with Dr Konstantinos Kapodistrias, Deputy Governor of Ionian Islands Region (Greece), being nominated as 1st Vice-President for the period 2021-2023.

Besides dealing with administrative and statutory matters, the 2021 BBSC General Assembly focused on the priorities for the Adriatic-Ionian, Balkan, and wider Black Sea regions, in line with the CPMR priorities on maritime affairs, transport, macroregional and sea basin strategies and neighbourhood, and the opportunities to encourage capitalisation of the area’s untapped potential.

Based on President Teodorescu’s strategy for his term, the BBSC Executive Secretary set up a BBSC Action Plan that is regularly updated in collaboration with all BBSC members.

2022 ANNUAL GENERAL ASSEMBLY

On 10 June 2022, the members of the CPMR Balkan & Black Sea Commission, kindly hosted in Patras by the Region of Western Greece and Deputy Governor Fokion Zaimis, held their Annual General Assembly in a hybrid format.

Our statutory meeting was held in the framework of the Regional Growth Conference 2022 that was organised in Patras (Region of Western Greece) from 9-11 June 2022, thanks to the kind invitation of the Region of Western Greece.

The delegations of the BBSC Members had the opportunity to participate in the different sessions covering topics such as sustainable growth, climate crisis, digital innovation and entrepreneurship, culture, energy and connectivity, and networking with high-level officials and stakeholders from across Europe.

The Regional Growth Conference has been co-organised with great success since 2013 by the newspaper PELOPONNÉSE and the Region of Western Greece.

Academics, senior government officials, representatives of political parties and local governments, dignitaries from the economic and business community, and civil society meet every year in Patras to discuss issues related to regional growth and development in Greece.

The 2022 RGC edition will focus on substantive discussions in key sectors such as Regional Development, Economy, Infrastructure, Climate Change, Energy, Health, Agriculture, Tourism, Social Cohesion and Resilience and, importantly, Youth with the active participation of government officials, including MPs, governors, mayors, public administration representatives, distinct bodies of other European countries, executives of the European Commission, academics and representatives of civil society. The conference is based on the promotion of initiatives in all the above areas, pushing forward the introduction of innovative policies, public-private partnerships, the strengthening of business relations and the attraction of investment vehicles of the private sector.
2023 ANNUAL GENERAL ASSEMBLY

On 15 June 2023, the members of the CPMR Balkan & Black Sea Commission, kindly hosted in Corfu by the Region of Ionian Islands (Greece) and Deputy Governor Konstantinos Kapodistrias, held their Annual General Assembly in a hybrid format.

Our annual meeting followed the AI-NURECC PLUS High-level Conference “From Covid-19 crisis to new pathways for a sustainable tourism in the Adriatic and Ionian area” and we had the opportunity to be updated on and discuss topics of Urbain Air Mobility, the Common Maritime Agenda for the Black Sea, Culture & Tourism in the Danube Macroregion, and “Skilled workforce for greener ports in high demand and opportunities for the BBSC members”.

Deputy Governor Konstantinos Kapodistrias on the left, Mihai Huleni, VP of Tulcea County Council on the right

Fokion Zaimis, Deputy Governor of Entrepreneurship, Research & Innovation of Region of Western Greece Region
MEMORANDA OF UNDERSTANDING, COOPERATION AGREEMENT, COLLABORATION WITH other THINK TANKS

The CPMR and its BBSC have extended their cooperation with networks operating in or focusing on the BBSC region and for the current period we have the following Memoranda of Understanding, Cooperation Agreement, and participations:

The CPMR and the Organization of the Black Sea Economic Cooperation (BSEC), sectoral dialogue partners since 2009, signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) in 2017. Since the signature of this MoU, the CPMR and BSEC PERMIS (Permanent International Secretariat of the Organization of the Black Sea Economic Cooperation) collaborated on several areas including Transport (Maritime Transport, & Accessibility), Social & Economic Cohesion, Environment & Energy, Tourism, Trade, Economic Development and SMEs, Science and Technology, and Information & Communication Technologies have been even closer.

The CPMR and the Black Sea Association of Maritime Institutions (BSAMI) signed a Memorandum of Understanding in 2020, aiming at further development of projects and initiatives concerning the common interests of BSAMI and CPMR Members, in fields such as Maritime Education and Training, Transport, Tourism, Youth, Science and Technology.

On 27 June 2022, the CPMR BBSC signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with the National Alliance for Local Economic Development (NALED) located in Serbia.

Ms Eleni Marianou, Secretary General of the CPMR, welcomed that the long-standing collaboration between these two organisations has resulted in the signing of the MoU: “We are glad to further enhance our cooperation with organisations in the Balkans, like the National Alliance for Local Economic Development, in the framework of CPMR’s Balkan & Black Sea Commission and work together with Western Balkan stakeholders to achieve enhanced social and territorial cohesion in Europe and contribute to European integration”.

Secretary General Eleni Marianou signs a memorandum of understanding
The Memorandum of Understanding, signed at the CPMR’s premisses in Brussels, aims to enable both organisations to collaborate in joint initiatives to promote a frame for business-friendly environment in the Balkans, Adriatic-Ionian, and wider Black Sea regions. through the development of projects and initiatives with regards to the common interest to all member states candidate countries and potential candidates for the EU Membership.

Sharing their expertise, both organisations will strengthen their relations with the objective of enhancing cooperation on the issues on common interest in several areas such as Transport, including Maritime and River Transport, Accessibility; Social & Economic Cohesion: Environment & Energy; Tourism; Cultural & Creative Industries; Youth; Trade, Economic Development and SMEs; Science and Technology; Information & Communication Technologies and Territorial development.

NALED, a non-profit and non-partisan association, gathers over 300 members among which businesses, local governments, and civil society organisations, which work together on creating favourable conditions for living and working in Serbia.

NALED also acts as a secretariat of the Regional Network for Business Friendly Certification (BFC Network) in South East Europe (SEE), a unique mechanism established in 2012 for improving competitiveness in the SEE countries and the living standards of their inhabitants, bringing together over 20 members from five countries (Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, North Macedonia, Serbia and Croatia) including representatives of line ministries, chambers of commerce, association of municipalities, development agencies, CSOs and academic institutions. The BFC Network aims at improving business environment at local level through knowledge transfer, best practice exchange, design and implementation of reforms.

The CPMR and the International Centre for Black Sea Studies (ICBSS) signed a Cooperation Agreement in the framework of the 47th General Assembly of the CPMR, which was kindly hosted in Palermo by the Region of Sicily (Italy). This Agreement is a valid continuation of the interactive cooperation that the CPMR and the ICBSS have established. The CPMR’s Balkan & Black Sea Commission (BBSC) and the ICBSS have a mutual interest in promoting constructive dialogue within the wider Black Sea region among all relevant stakeholders, Regional and Local Authorities, public and private sectors, industry, academia, and civil society.

The CPMR is a member of the Eastern Partnership Civil Society Forum (EaP CSF), the largest umbrella organisation of NGOs from the Eastern Partnership region and the EU, working together with +1000 organisations to promote European integration, facilitate reforms and democratic transformations in the six Eastern Partnership countries – Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, Republic of Moldova and Ukraine. EaP CSF’s mission is to ensure the effective participation of civil societies of the Eastern Partnership and the EU in the process of planning, monitoring and implementation of the Eastern Partnership policy in constructive dialogue with the EU and EaP decision-makers. As CPMR BBSC we also participate in the Working Group 2 on “Economic Integration & Convergence with EU Policies” which provides expertise on a range of topics, including trade, convergence with EU policies and standards, harmonisation of digital markets, and structural economic reforms.

The CPMR participates in the Network of Think Tanks on the Eastern Partnership, established in 2020. This network aims to engage leading think tanks, policy experts, and policymakers from the 27 EU Member States and the 6 Eastern Partnership countries, and beyond, in an ongoing inclusive, coordinated, and systematic dialogue on the EU’s post-2020 eastern policy. The network supports structured dialogue among stakeholders with interest in the development of EU policy in relation to the Eastern Partnership.
MARITIME AFFAIRS

THIS SECTION INCLUDES:
THE COMMON MARITIME AGENDA
LAUNCH OF THE BLACK SEA SRIA
IMPLEMENTATION PLAN
EU MISSION AREA
SEARICA INTERGROUP
COMMON MARITIME AGENDA (CMA) FOR THE BLACK SEA AND BLACK SEA STRATEGIC RESEARCH AND INNOVATION AGENDA (SRIA)

The CPMR is fully associated, as an observer, with the Steering Group of the Common Maritime Agenda for the Black Sea.

The CPMR participated in the Blue Entrepreneurship Workshop that took place on 4 October 2021, under the Turkish coordination of the Common Maritime Agenda for the Black Sea.

Across several sessions, speakers working on leading initiatives in the Black Sea region provided insights on how the CMA, the Strategic Research and Innovation Agenda (SRIA), and related projects can further support local business ecosystems.

During the second half of the workshop, project ideas developed by Black Sea SMEs and start-ups with the support of CMA National Hubs were the focus of an interactive Hackathon, in which the CPMR participated to present the Atlantic Smart Ports Blue Acceleration Network (AspBAN) Project, an idea that could support blue economy businesses ecosystem capacity in the Black Sea.

On Thursday 18 November, the CPMR BBSC participated in the national stakeholder event held by the Romanian National Hub for the Common Maritime Agenda for the Black Sea, with the support of the Black Sea Assistance Mechanism.

With the overarching theme of “Unlocking the Development Potential for the Black Sea” the event kicked off with a high-level panel discussion on Synergy potential in the Black Sea, followed by two thematic working groups on Marine Litter and Tourism, aquaculture, and blue entrepreneurship.

On 22 November 2021, the CPMR BBSC represented by its President, Mr Horia Teodorescu, participated in the Annual Stakeholders Conference “Towards Projects for a Resilient and Sustainable Blue Economy in the Black Sea”, organised by the Turkish Coordination of the Common Maritime Agenda for the Black Sea.

On 22-23 November 2023, the CPMR BBSC was represented by Mr Valentin Moldoveanu, on behalf of Mr Horia Teodorescu, President of the CPMR Balkan & Black Sea Commission, and President of Tulcea County Council, in the Black Sea Stakeholder Conference “Joining efforts for a sustainable, modern and competitive blue economy in the Black Sea”, in Bucharest (Romania).

The Black Sea Common Maritime Agenda Stakeholder Conference 2023 took place under the auspices of the CMA Romanian coordination.

The conference aimed to be a key event for stakeholders in the regions. It gathered voices from diverse sectors to address challenges and opportunities in the Black Sea basin, fostering knowledge sharing and collaborative efforts for its sustainable development.

Mr Moldoveanu participated as a speaker in the session on “Boosting Innovation and Blue Skills” and shared with participants the CPMR experience in blue skills and blue careers as an engine for innovation and competitiveness, and the concrete example of our iSOL-MET Project.
LAUNCH OF THE BLACK SEA SRIA IMPLEMENTATION PLAN: WHAT IS NEXT FOR THE BLACK SEA RESEARCH AND INNOVATION COOPERATION?

This SEArica High-level Conference, held on 4 May 2023, was kindly hosted and chaired by MEP Marian-Jean Marinescu, and co-organised by the Black Sea CONNECT Project and the European Commission DG RTD, with the support of the Conference of Peripheral Maritime Regions (CPMR) and its Balkan & Black Sea Commission (BBSC).

In the framework of this SEArica conference at the European Parliament, in Brussels, was launched the Black Sea Strategic Research and Innovation Agenda (SRIA). Participants included high-level representatives of the European Commission, regional organisations and research-performing organizations, and more than 110 stakeholders from policymaking, research, and innovation communities from European Union member states and Black Sea littoral countries. Together, they launched this guiding document and paved the way for future joint actions in research and innovation, exchanging of best practices and knowledge, and enhancing capacity building in the region.

The Black Sea SRIA Implementation Plan facilitated under the Black Sea CONNECT CSA, aims to set the foundational work to protect the unique habitats of the Black Sea while supporting the development of sea-based sectors, which will then boost the blue economy and help generate more employment.

It will direct participants from academia, funding organizations, industry, policy, and society to address the fundamental challenges of the Black Sea, promote the blue economy, build vital support systems and innovative research infrastructure, enhance education, and build capacity.

This document is a long-lasting guide to catalyse new ideas and innovations towards and with the Black Sea community and beyond with adjacent regions, actors, and instruments for a healthy, resilient, and sustainable Black Sea.

In this high-level conference opened by MEP Marian-Jean Marinescu and introduced by Ms Delilah Al Khudhairy, Director Maritime Policy and Blue Economy, Directorate-General for Maritime Affairs and Fisheries (DG MARE) of the European Commission, the CPMR and its BBSC were represented by Mr Mihai Huleni, Vice-President of Tulcea County Council (Romania). Mr Huleni participated in the same panel with Ambassador Lazăr Comănescu, Secretary General, Permanent International Secretariat (PERMIS), Organization of the Black Sea Economic Cooperation (BSEC), and shared the Tulcea and CPMR’s perspectives regarding the different challenges in the field and the result-oriented approach we should have together with other regional authorities, international and regional stakeholders.
Ms Justine Brossard, CPMR Project & Policy Officer, had the opportunity to present the project PREP4BLUE, through which the CPMR aims to organise a pilot stakeholder assembly for the Danube and Black Sea lighthouse.

Indeed, PREP4BLUE has the overarching objective to facilitate a successful implementation of the first phase of the Mission Ocean and Waters (2022-2025), by delivering tools, trainings and recommendations to the stakeholders implementing the projects of the Mission, and will therefore test an innovative way of engaging a wide range of different groups of stakeholders for the development of solutions for the restoration of the Danube River basin and the Black Sea basin.

EU MISSION AREA: HEALTHY OCEANS, SEAS, COASTAL AND INLAND WATERS

DANUBE AND BLACK SEA LIGHTHOUSE LAUNCHING EVENT

The Mission Ocean and Waters Danube and Black Sea Lighthouse will flow towards the development of innovative solutions for the preservation and restoration of the Danube and Black ecosystems and biodiversity.

On 3-4 April 2023 in Bucharest, Romania, the CPMR participated in the Launching Event of the Danube and Black Sea Lighthouse, to present the objectives of the implementation of the Mission Ocean and Waters in the Danube and Black lighthouse and to kick-start the collaboration between community and sectoral stakeholders in the region to find solutions for the restoration of this precious ecosystem.

The first day of the event was dedicated to the presentation of the Mission Ocean and Waters and the existing main organisations of the lighthouse that implement relevant initiatives and models of cooperation in the Danube and Black Sea basins. The BBSC was represented by its Executive Secretary who notably highlighted the importance of the contribution of regional authorities in the lighthouse to provide more visibility to territorial actors with innovative restoration models and showcased the involvement of the BBSC in relevant projects for the Mission.
The second day of the meeting launched the EcoDaLLi Living Lab System, where the CPMR representatives exchanged with the coordinators of the project EcoDaLLi, for the preparation of the pilot stakeholder assembly. EcoDaLLi has the role to centralise Danube governance structures in terms of innovative solutions for the restoration, protection and preservation of the Danube basin and its Delta. It will notably support the activities of the innovation action projects DANUBE4ALL and DALIA and coordinates all the actors of the region through a living lab system representing each part of the Danube with a specific focus: Upper Danube: innovation ecosystems / Middle Danube: climate change/ Lower Danube: water systems / Danube Delta & Black Sea: biodiversity.

Thanks to this event, the CPMR learned more about the concept of associated regions, which offers an excellent opportunity to regional authorities of being part of the Mission and benefiting from the results of the Mission innovative projects in other basins, such as the DANUBE4ALL and CLIMAREST Projects are their respective calls for associated regions.

The launching event of the Danube and Black Sea Lighthouse was, therefore, a great opportunity for the CPMR and its BBSC to foster current collaborations towards the restoration objective of the Danube River basin and to kick-start cooperation with the project partners of the lighthouse.

The PREP4BLUE Danube and Black Sea stakeholder assembly will therefore serve as a model to engage the stakeholders in one of the living labs. The stakeholder assembly event is under preparation and will be held in 2024.
The Seas, Rivers, Islands and Coastal Areas Intergroup follows on from the Seas and Coastal Areas Intergroup launched in 2010 and for the current European Parliament term brings together 107 MEPs from 23 different Member States and 6 political groups. The CPMR has been holding the Secretariat to the SEArica Intergroup.

Relevant EU policies and initiatives related to maritime topics, such as the Blue Growth Strategy and the Framework for Maritime Spatial Planning, coordinated under the Integrated Maritime Policy, as well as the different Sea Basin Strategies and, more recently, the Green Deal, the revamped Industrial Strategy or the new Maritime and Fisheries Fund reflect the EU awareness of the great possibilities offered by the seas and oceans. These opportunities are key drivers for the sustainable economic growth of the European Union’s territories.

While the European Parliament continues to take action on the several different maritime policies, the Seas, Rivers, Islands and Coastal Areas Intergroup works to ensure that Europe of the Seas remains a major, cross-cutting and well-identified issue.

From this transversal perspective, the SEArica Intergroup stimulates debate and promotes concrete actions in support of a comprehensive approach to maritime-related policies, that takes into account the links between environmental sustainability, maritime industrial policy and transport, research, ocean literacy, exploitation of marine living resources.

The Intergroup includes a sea-basin dimension that considers regional and territorial specificities. It has also a strong Island component and will continue to work to ensure that the European Union duly considers the specific issues faced by the islands.

The CPMR BBSC has contributed to the renewal of the Intergroup with a Vice-Chair responsible for the Danube and the Black Sea, MEP Carmen Avram.

The CPMR BBSC since July 2021 has co-organised under SEArica the following conferences:
SEAS, RIVERS, ISLANDS AND COASTAL AREAS (SEArica) INTERGROUP OF THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT

MARINE LITTER IN THE DANUBE AND THE BLACK SEA REGION

The Seas, Rivers, Islands and Coastal Areas (SEArica) Intergroup together with the Balkan & Black Sea Commission of the Conference of Peripheral Maritime Regions (BBSC-CPMR) and the International Centre for Black Sea Studies (ICBSS) organised on 4 November 2021, an online conference, hosted and chaired by MEP Carmen Avram, took the form of a moderated exchange with key regional, political, and private stakeholders from the Danube and Black Sea regions. The online meeting promoted inter-basin and knowledge exchange by presenting key takeaways and best practices from other sea basins of Europe. The event aimed to discuss and come up with tailored and concrete proposals to tackle marine litter in the region.

The event offered different stakeholders from the wider Black Sea region and beyond the opportunity to share their experience and exchange ideas with representatives from the European institutions, and encouraged multilateral cooperation in the framework of different EU initiatives and programmes implemented in the area. The conference provided a dialogue platform amongst EU, regional and national policy-makers and key stakeholders, to encourage a debate that will allow for a better understanding of the challenges, as faced by stakeholders on the ground and the different opportunities that derive from the various EU policies, strategies and initiatives in this diverse but fragile region. The BBSC was represented by Professor Ioannis Kalavrouziotis, President of the Regional Council of Research & Innovation of the Region of Western Greece, who shared their experience in the safe use of waste and environmental protection.

SEARICA CONFERENCE ON THE EU STRATEGY FOR THE ADRIATIC AND IONIAN REGION (EUSAIR): FOCUS ON BLUE GROWTH

The Seas, Rivers, Islands and Coastal Areas (SEArica) Intergroup with the support of the Conference of Peripheral Maritime Regions, its Balkan & Black Sea Commission, and the European Commission’s DG MARE and DG REGIO organised on 4 February 2022, an online conference on the EU Strategy for the Adriatic and Ionian Region (EUSAIR). The EUSAIR is one of the four EU macro-regional strategies.

The Strategy was jointly developed by the Commission and the Adriatic-Ionian Region countries and stakeholders, which agreed to work together on the areas of common interest for the benefit of each country and the whole region. The EUSAIR covered back then nine countries: four EU Member States (Croatia, Greece, Italy, Slovenia) and five non-EU countries (Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, North Macedonia, Serbia).

The strategy addresses four pillars: Blue Growth (1), Connecting the Region (2), Environmental Quality (3) and Sustainable Tourism (4).
This SEArica conference concentrated on the state of play on the implementation of Pillar 1 and its specific objectives: to promote research and innovation in blue economy sectors, to adapt to sustainable seafood production/consumption and to improve sea basin governance.

The online conference was opened by MEP Tonino Picula, SEArica Chair and also welcomed MEP Brando Benifei, SEArica member.

The CPMR BBSC was represented in this online conference by Dr Konstantinos Kapodistrias, Deputy Governor of the Ionian Islands Region (Greece) and 1st Vice-president of the Balkan & Black Sea Commission of the CPMR, and Mr Fokion Zaimis, Deputy Governor of Entrepreneurship, Research and Innovation Western Greece.

**SEArica Conference on Blue Skills**

This online conference was organised on 23 May 2022 by the CPMR and opened by MEP Carmen Avram, SEArica Vice-Chair for the Danube and the Black Sea.

A competitive, resilient, and socially fair blue economy needs highly qualified and skilled professionals. Yet today, many blue economy sectors have difficulties finding the right people, which hampers their growth. Within the shift towards a sustainable blue economy approach lie great opportunities for maritime and island regions. To seize these opportunities and to make the sustainable transition as well as generational renewal a success, a revolution in blue skills is needed.

The European Commission has launched the Pact for Skills, a shared engagement model for skills development in Europe. Signatories of the Pact are strongly encouraged to translate their engagement into concrete commitments on upskilling and reskilling. These commitments will bring the key principles of the Pact to life:
- Pact for skills for offshore renewable energy
- Upskilling shipbuilding and maritime technology workers in Europe

EU maritime regions are supporting these actions to solve this mismatch and:
- reduce skills gap between education offer and labour market needs
- improve communication and cooperation between education and industry
- improve the attractiveness and awareness of career opportunities in the blue economy
- improve the ocean literacy culture at the basis of it all

The SEArica conference aims to bring together representatives from EU coastal regions, stakeholders from maritime territories, EU Commission officials, Members of the EU Parliament, and Young Ocean ambassadors to discuss about needed actions in terms of Blue Skills and the implementation of the many initiatives and proposals that are currently being put forward.

Among the speakers, we had the pleasure of having Professor Maria Lekakou, University of the Aegean (Regions of North and South Aegean, Greece), presenting our MINE-EMI and iSOL-MET Projects, and Ms Pinar Uygurer, Project Manager at Institute of Marine Sciences, METU (Türkiye) presenting our BRIDGE-BS Project.
TRANSPORT AND ACCESSIBILITY

THIS SECTION INCLUDES:
ASPBAN PROJECT WORKSHOP
BLUE PORTS PROJECT
AspBAN Project Workshop | Tapping in the Potential of Balkan and Black Sea Ports for the Future of Blue Economy

On 22 September 2022, the Balkan & Black Sea Commission of the CPMR organised in Poti (Samegrelo-Zemo Svaneti Region, Georgia) a workshop of the Atlantic Smart Ports Blue Acceleration Network (AspBAN) project.

The workshop was held in a hybrid format and preceded by a study visit to the Poti Sea Port. The Poti Sea Port, managed by APM Terminals (Maersk group), is the largest port in Georgia, handling containers, liquids, general cargo, Ro Ro and freight/passenger ferries. The port serves as a European gateway for international trade in the Caucasus (Georgia, Armenia, and Azerbaijan) and Central Asia (Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan, Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan). It offers direct feeder and ferry traffic within the Black Sea ports and is connected to the national railway network, with connection to all key cities in Georgia and its hinterland. APM Terminals Poti is actively working on developing a middle corridor through which cargo is being transported from China to Europe via Poti Port. In addition, the company has a plan to build the first deep-water port in Poti.

The Atlantic Smart Ports Blue Acceleration Network (AspBAN) project, in which the CPMR is involved through its Atlantic Arc Commission (AAC), has received funding from the European Union’s European Maritime and Fisheries Fund (EMFF). The project aims to create an open innovation ecosystem based on a network composed of ports of the Atlantic Strategy Group (ASG), of the EU Atlantic, of the Atlantic EEA and of the Transatlantic area that will operate as gateways and blue economy hubs.

The project is related to the EU Atlantic Action Plan 2.0. Pillar 1: “Ports as Gateways and Hubs for the Blue Economy”. Focused on developing a dynamic acceleration platform, AspBAN by becoming the main playground for the development of new blue businesses, EU Atlantic Ports have the opportunity to diversify their revenue sources and work towards a sustainable ocean economy.

The AspBAN project learned from the experience of the Balkan & Black Sea area when it comes to the development of ports as open-innovation ecosystems for SMEs acting in the maritime sector and assessed its potential transferability in these geographical areas.

The BBSC was represented in this workshop by Mr George Telonis, Honorary President of the Shipping Agents Association of Patras (Region of Western Greece is a CPMR BBSC Member and Strategic Partner of the AspBAN project).
CPMR BBSC SUPPORTS BLUE PORTS PROJECT IN GEORGIA AND THE BALKAN & BLACK SEA REGION

The CPMR Balkan & Black Sea Commission, represented by its Executive Secretary, participated on 7 December 2023 in a Forum on “Ports and green transition”, organised by the Renewable & Sustainable Energy Laboratory (RESEL) of the Technical University of Crete (TUC) (Region of Crete, Greece) and Professor Dr Theocharis Tsoutsos, RESEL TUC Director.

The Forum was kindly hosted by the Chania Chamber of Commerce and Industry, on the occasion of two new projects of RESEL TUC:
- the “Green Ports” Project on ports in “green transition”, supported by the Heinrich Böll Foundation-Thessaloniki, and
- the BLUE PORTS Project, funded by the European Maritime, Fisheries and Aquaculture Fund (EMFAF).

The CPMR BBSC has facilitated the BLUE-PORTS partnership and the participation of the Maritime Transport Agency of Georgia, to ensure the coverage of our Georgian Member Regions – Ajara Autonomous Republic and Samegrelo-Zemo Svaneti Region.

The Forum was held within the framework of the Kick-off Meeting of the BLUE PORTS project, with the support of Mr Manolis Koutroulakis, General Secretary of the Aegean and Islands Policy, Ministry of Maritime Affairs & Insular Policy, of the Hellenic Republic, and the European Commission’s Directorate-General for Maritime Affairs and Fisheries (DG MARE).

The BLUE PORTS project, coordinated by the Renewable & Sustainable Energy Laboratory of the Technical University of Crete, aims to develop blue economy skills for the port staff, to support green transition.

A training and certification scheme will be developed to acquire and upgrade green skills required for the effective implementation of the European Green Deal, the European Strategy for a Sustainable Blue Economy, the Offshore Renewable Energy Strategy, and the Action Plan for the Circular Economy. The project involves 6 partners and 2 cooperating organisations from 5 different countries inside and outside the European Union (Greece, Spain, Italy, Georgia, Tunisia), including ports (Heraklion Port Authority S.A., Port of Valencia), shipping organisations, academic institutions, ministries, training, and certification bodies.

The Forum was attended by Mr George Alexakis (Region of Crete), representing the CPMR, and leading experts of the shipping industry, at the European, national, and regional levels, representatives of port authorities, as well as policymakers, and shared experiences and opinions regarding pathways to implement the vision of zero-emission sustainable ports.

The CPMR BBSC will support the BLUE PORTS project’s visibility in the Balkan and Black Sea region and encourage possible replication of its best practices in the territory of our membership.
ADRIATIC-IONIAN REGION AND BALKANS

THIS SECTION INCLUDES:
THE CORE DAYS IN CROATIA
COOPERATION BY EMILIA-ROMAGNA REGION
YOUTH MANIFESTO FOR THE WESTERN BALKANS 2.0
The Deputy Governor of Entrepreneurship, Research and Innovation of the Region of Western Greece, Mr Fokion Zaimis, represented the CPMR and our BBSC in the **CORE Days 2022**, on 16-18 October 2022 in Dubrovnik (Croatia), further to the invitation from the National Alliance for Local Economic Development (NALED) in Serbia, our Memorandum of Understanding co-signatory.

Gathering local economic development actors in South-East Europe region - mayors, businesses, institutions, associations, media, as well as representatives of the European Commission, EU Member States institutions and donors, CORE Days promotes a culture of dialogue in the region, fostering the exchange of smart, practical solutions for better business environment, digital transformation, and green economy. (see the [agenda](#) of the meeting)

The Conference, supported by the German Development Cooperation implemented by GIZ through Open Regional Fund Modernization of Municipal Services (GIZ ORF MMS), and other organisations, was held in Dubrovnik (Croatia) from 16 to 18 October 2022. CORE Days brought closer together the policies, best practices and instruments implemented by the EU to support the progress and competitiveness of Western Balkans 6 (WB6)* countries, with special emphasis on the local level. Within the traditional BFC SEE certificate award ceremony, the top Business-Friendly cities and communities in South East Europe was officially announced.

The Conference focused on the digitisation of services and environmental protection. Reflections on the different institutional frameworks and bureaucracy were also expressed.

The majority of participants also supported that healthy entrepreneurship and innovation is a challenge for many countries.

Deputy Governor Zaimis participated as a speaker in the panel on Innovative Financing of Local Development in WB6, together with the representative of the European Commission’s DG REGIO, the Mayor of Ljubljana (Slovenia), and the Director of the European Affairs Fund of the Autonomous Province of Vojvodina (Serbia).

The Conference was also attended by high-level participants, including former Prime Ministers, Ministers, and Mayors, from the Western Balkans and the wider region.

*The Western Balkans 6 (WB6) countries are Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo**, Montenegro, North Macedonia, and Serbia. **This designation is without prejudice to positions on status and is in line with UNSCR 1244 and the ICJ Opinion on the Kosovo declaration of independence.
WEBINAR – THE GOOD EXPERIENCES OF TERRITORIAL AND INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION BY EMILIA-ROMAGNA REGION

On 21 September 2023, together with Emilia-Romagna Region (Italy), an active member of the CPMR, we co-organised a Webinar on “The good experiences of territorial and international cooperation of Emilia-Romagna Region to be shared with the Balkan & Black Sea Commission”.

This webinar aimed to introduce the political interests of Emilia-Romagna Region in attending the Balkan & Black Sea Commission and the importance to enlarge the vision to the Southeast Europe, present possible interconnections with the IPA ADRINO Interreg Transnational Programme and the priority topics dealt by the BBSC members, present projects carried out by Emilia-Romagna Region in the Adriatic and Ionian area and new opportunities for the 2021-2027 programming period, and some project examples that could be replicated in the wider Black Sea region.

YOUTH MANIFESTO FOR THE WESTERN BALKANS 2.0

On 10 October 2023, the BBSC Executive Secretary and Coordinator of the AI-NURECC PLUS Initiative moderated a workshop organised by the Cooperation and Development Institute (CDI) (Albania). The workshop focused on the “Manifesto for Young People by Young People to Shape the European Cooperation Policy” in the framework of the 21st European Week of Regions and Cities, in Brussels.

The workshop aimed to enhance the youth participation in EUSAIR initiatives and projects; promote the Young Manifesto for the youth involvement in the future of European Territorial Cooperation; enhance the points related to youth in the EU Cohesion Policy 2021-2027 and in the Croatian presidency of the EUSAIR; promote the main objectives of the European Year of Skills 2023, and how EUSAIR works towards a greener, more inclusive and digital Europe including young people for a better future; promote the ideas and wishes of young people on how to improve territorial cooperation in order to make young generations feel heard by EU top decision makers; and present work of EUSAIR and of the other macro regional strategies in the context.
WIDER BLACK SEA REGION

THIS SECTION INCLUDES:
12TH INTERNATIONAL BLACK SEA SYMPOSIUM & FINAL STAKEHOLDERS CONFERENCE
BALKANS & BLACK SEA FORUM
13TH INTERNATIONAL BLACK SEA SYMPOSIUM
The Final Stakeholders Conference took place on 23 November 2022, in the framework of the projects Black Sea React!, Black Sea Cruise, and CulTourE4Youth (cooperation project with CPMR BBSC), which are co-funded by the European Commission under Grant Contract ENI/2020/421-957.

In this event – aimed to present the results and applications developed under the three projects as well as to promote networking and exchange of information among regional and international stakeholders with interest in environmental protection, culture and tourism, transport, and youth entrepreneurship – the BBSC was represented by its Executive Secretary that shared our CPMR experience from different EU-funded projects targeting youth.

The BBSC participated in the 12th International Black Sea Symposium (IBSS), held on 22 November 2022, in Athens (Greece). The 12th International Black Sea Symposium built on the success and positive impact of its previous editions and invites regional and international stakeholders with an interest in the Black Sea area, to reflect on the role of the Organisation of the Black Sea Economic Cooperation (BSEC) over the past thirty years and exchange views on its future perspectives.

On the occasion of the 30th Anniversary of the BSEC Organisation, and amidst immense regional developments, the 12th IBSS aimed to: reflect on BSEC’s role over the years, as a pivotal regional and international actor; exchange views on how the Organisation could be better equipped to meet present-day challenges; identify key priorities and strategic goals for the future. The event was co-funded by the European Commission under Grant Contract ENI/2020/421-957.

The Final Stakeholders Conference “Strengthening the Project Implementation Capacity, dialogue and Cooperation in the Black Sea Region”, that followed the International Black Sea Symposium, was organised jointly by the Permanent International Secretariat of the Organization of the Black Sea Economic Cooperation (BSEC PERMIS), our Memorandum of Understanding co-signatory, and the International Centre for Black Sea Studies (ICBSS).
2022 BALKANS & BLACK SEA FORUM

The Balkans & Black Sea Forum 2022 was held on 13-14 December 2022, in Athens (Greece), at a time of numerous geopolitical, economic, and power-shifting challenges that influence the global scene and endanger the social and economic equilibrium of regions. In a world of conflict and constant disruption, the BBSF2022 aspires to pave the way for a sincere, coherent, and constructive exchange of views and dialogue, needed today more than ever before.

The conference focused on 30 focal areas, hosted 30 speakers from Greece and the world as well as delegates representing leading businesses, policymakers, diplomats, think tanks, research, and academia.

The CPMR took an active part in the Forum and was represented by its Secretary General, Ms Eleni Marianou, who delivered the speech in the session dedicated to “Regional cooperation-integration based on the economic geography of the regions”.

13TH INTERNATIONAL BLACK SEA SYMPOSIUM | THE BLACK SEA IN CRISIS: CHALLENGES & OPPORTUNITIES IN AN UNSTABLE ENVIRONMENT

The CPMR BBSC participated in the 13th International Black Sea Symposium with title ‘The Black Sea in crises: challenges & opportunities in an unstable environment’, which was held successfully in Athens, on 2 November 2023, organised by the International Centre for Black Sea Studies (ICBSS).

In its thirteenth edition and amidst immense regional developments, the ICBSS provided a dialogue platform for regional and international stakeholders to exchange on a regional response to address opportunities and mitigate challenges in the Black Sea region, in relation to economic, geopolitical and environmental perspectives.

Special emphasis was placed on the significance of regional cooperation and closer policy-science-business interaction, as means to alleviating the impact of climate crisis and the increasing geopolitical instability in the wider Black Sea region.

Opening the Symposium, ICBSS Director General, Mr Georgios Mitrakos, highlighted the impact of the multiple human-induced and nature-driven crises currently affecting the Black Sea Region, both within and beyond its borders.

“The CPMR, as an association of 150 Regions from 24 States from the EU and beyond, is a regular partner and official interlocutor of the European Institutions and a long-standing Sectoral Dialogue Partner and MoU co-signatory of the Organization of the Black Sea Economic Cooperation (BSEC). Mainly surrounded by the sea, the peripheral and maritime member regions of the CPMR have cross-cutting interests, such as developing the accessibility in the regions from the EU and neighbouring countries to improve their connectivity. On the borders of Europe, the CPMR member regions, showing their support and solidarity with Ukraine from the very first beginning, have welcomed and integrated migrants and refugees.” Ms Marianou recalled the importance of taking into account the regional stakeholders who live the realities on the ground each day, and encouraged them to work together more than ever!
Mr Mitrakos emphasized the efforts of the BSEC family of institutions to provide knowledge and enable synergies that will facilitate joint actions, to mitigate the implications of regional crises and harness opportunities for a better future.

Three interactive panels with prominent experts from policy, business, academia and civil society served as a means to unfold the discussion focusing on the three main nodes: regional cooperation, economic development, climate change.

The first panel, moderated by ICBSS Director General, Mr Georgios Mitrakos and hosted representatives of regional organizations and think-tanks, who exchanged on the importance of regional cooperation and the role of institutions in building mutual understanding and fostering dialogue.

The distinguished panelists Amb. Lazăr Comănescu, BSEC PERMIS Secretary General, Mr Asaf Hajiyev, PABSEC Secretary General, Mr Achraf Bouali, Head of the OECD Istanbul Centre, Mr Gladden Pappin, President of the Hungarian Institute of International Affairs (HIIA), and Mr Marco Ricceri, Secretary General of Italian EURISPES Institute, stressed the importance of cooperation, correlation and coordination among countries and stakeholders, to respond to regional challenges and maintain resilient synergies.

The second panel, moderated by the BBSC Executive Secretary, hosted representatives of academia and business, i.e., Dr Dragoș Mateescu, Director of the Department of Analysis of the Romanian Diplomatic Institute; Ms Lina Tsaltampasi, President of the Greek Association of Women Entrepreneurs; Mr Panayotis Gavras, Head Policy and Strategy at the Black Sea Trade & Development Bank (BSTDB); and Dr Dimitris Gavalas, Professor at the Ports Management and Shipping Dept. at the National and Kapodistrian University of Athens (Greece).

The panellists discussed the state-of-play and future perspectives of regional economic cooperation, concerning the role of the Black Sea as a pivotal corridor connecting regions. Particular emphasis was placed on the potential of women’s entrepreneurship and the role of women as a valuable driving force of development.

The third panel, on climate change, welcomed three renowned experts from civil society and academia, and discussed policy and science-driven solutions to address the devastating effects of climate change on the environment and livelihoods of people across regions.

The 13th ICBSS served as a dialogue hub for seventy regional and international stakeholders, i.e., policymakers and policy-delivery stakeholders, researchers, business, academia and civil society representatives from Black Sea and European countries.
CULTURE AND TOURISM

THIS SECTION INCLUDES
THE REGIONAL STAKEHOLDERS
WEBINAR
HIGH-LEVEL FORUM
REGIONAL STAKEHOLDERS WEBINAR ON "CULTURAL TOURISM AND DIGITAL TRANSFORMATION IN THE BSEC REGION AND BEYOND: LESSONS LEARNED IN THE CONTEXT OF COVID-19 PANDEMIC"

On 10 November 2021 took place a webinar co-organised by the International Centre for Black Sea Studies (ICBSS) and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Armenia, aiming to bring together regional and international stakeholders to stimulate the discussion and exchange of good practices and lessons learned in cultural tourism; explore the untapped potential of regional partnerships; as well as, to enhance regional responses to and recovery from the pandemic and build resilience for the future.

Throughout the last decades, tourism and culture have become more interconnected, evolving and complementing each other. Cultural tourism is recognised as an important driver of the economic, social and environmental dimensions of sustainable development. The digital transformation of the cultural tourism sector and the preservation of cultural heritage have brought important advantages for people and opportunities for businesses.

With the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, tourism and cultural/creative industries have been among the most affected sectors of the economy facing similar challenges. Despite all these challenges, the sectors of tourism and culture have now an opportunity to create new partnerships and collaboration.

The webinar built on the discussions on culture and tourism launched in the Regional Stakeholders Conference "Black Sea Synergy: the way forward" (Athens, 7 November 2019), organised by the ICBSS within the framework of the ENI East Instrument. The results of the event are presented in the ICBSS Policy Paper 'Black Sea Synergy: the way forward' which sets the basis for a constructive follow-up with thematic workshops and project-oriented synergies in the targeted cooperation fields.

The BBSC was represented by its Executive Secretary who spoke at the first session dedicated to Cultural Tourism in the Age of Digitalisation.
On 18 November 2021 was held in Ljubljana (Slovenia) the High-level Forum on "Tourism, Digitalisation and Sustainable Development for the Black Sea". The event illustrated the opportunities and challenges to be addressed to exploit the potentials offered by digitalisation in order to promote sustainable tourism development across the sea basin.

The forum presented the main results that emerged from the project and will look forward on how to address the emerging challenges and bottlenecks preventing a full uptake of new technologies and business models for a sustainable sector in the Black Sea, as emerged throughout the project implementation.

A wide range of high-level policymakers, businesses, researchers and civil society organisations discussed such challenges and opportunities, as a way to identify valuable ways forward to promote Tourism 4.0 concept in the Black Sea and beyond.

The BBSC was represented by its Executive Secretary who participated in the panel discussion related to "The Challenges and opportunities for the tourism sector in the Black Sea" and shared the perspective of the CPMR and examples of relevant initiatives that could be developed in the wider Black Sea region.

The CPMR has supported Tourism 4.0 for the Black Sea (T4BS) since its submission as a project proposal and is among the signatories of the T4BS Declaration.
COOPERATION PROJECTS

THIS SECTION INCLUDES:
AI-NURECC PLUS
MINE-EMI
iSOL-MET
CulTourE4Youth
SOLAQUA
BRIDGE-BS
The Adriatic Ionian Network of Universities, Regions, Chambers of Commerce and Cities Initiative PLUS (AI-NURECC PLUS) was a preparatory action financed by DG REGIO that ended in December 2023. AI-NURECC PLUS capitalised on the results of the AI-NURECC Initiative that ended in December 2019.

This project was coordinated by the CPMR with the support of four partners from the area: the Adriatic Ionian Euroregion (AIE), the Forum of Adriatic and Ionian Cities (FAIC), the Forum of the Adriatic and Ionian Chambers of Commerce (FORUM AIC), and the Association of Universities of the Adriatic Ionian area (UniAdrion).

The AI-NURECC PLUS partners had joined their efforts to support the EU Strategy for the Adriatic and Ionian Sea Region (EUSAIR) implementation, ensuring deep and broad territorial coverage while enhancing Regional and Local Authorities’ appropriation of the EUSAIR main objectives and opportunities in the EUSAIR cross-pillar topics: “Research and Innovation”, “SMEs Development”, and “Skills Development”. AI-NURECC PLUS therefore supported entrepreneurship, transnational clusters, and digital innovation hubs activities for the EUSAIR.

Special attention was paid to Youth, also through initiatives addressed to integration and social inclusion, tools that further encouraged community sustainable development, cohesion and solidarity in the area. AI-NURECC PLUS also aimed at encouraging multi-actor networking and collaboration among representatives of the private and public sectors and civil society to foster coordination among EU, national, regional, and local policies to develop a Circular Economy.

AI-NURECC PLUS operated in the following fields: Sustainable Tourism, Cultural and Creative Industries, and Circular Economy, and Youth.

AI-NURECC PLUS activities also contributed to the implementation of the Cultural and Creative Regional Ecosystems (CCRE-S3) thematic area’s objectives in the EUSAIR area. CCRE-S3 is an AI-NURECC deliverable and the first thematic area with a specific focus on a Macro-Regional Strategy. The CCRE-S3 co-leading region responsible for the coordination of the Adriatic-Ionian, Balkan and Black Sea participants, is the Region of Western Greece, an active CPMR and BBSC member.
Coordinated by the Piri Reis University (Türkiye), the Maritime Innovative Network of Education for Emerging Maritime Issues (MINE-EMI) Project focused on the elaboration of a Joint Master Programme (JMPs) that facilitated developing skills and competencies to raise awareness on emerging maritime issues in the wider Black Sea region to promote sustainable management of the maritime sector in the region.

It involved representatives from the business sector and local administrations (i.e. Constanta Maritime University, Romania; Nikola Vaptsarov Naval Academy, Bulgaria; the University of the Aegean, Greece; the Marine Cluster of Bulgaria; and the Municipality of Piraeus, Greece) to fill the gap between requirements in the maritime sector (management, transport operations, logistic) and the current lacking offer of updated courses in that matter.

The CPMR, through its Balkan & Black Sea Commission (BBSC), was particularly involved in the project’s communications activities and hosted the project’s Final Conference in Brussels. In the longer term, the objective is to establish a “Black Sea Community of Maritime Education and Training Institutions” to contribute to boosting sustainable European maritime economy, Blue Growth, and Integrated Maritime Policy implementation by providing modern and adequate education and training.

This project was related to the CPMR’s work on maritime education and training.
ISOL-MET (CLOSED)

Coordinated by the University of the Aegean (Greece), the Innovative SOft Skills to Maritime Education and Training (iSOL-MET) Project focused on the creation of a comprehensive Maritime skills course programme for multidisciplinary and multicultural groups of students – through case study methodology – aiming to bridge the gap between the shipping world requirement and the needs of maritime universities’ students and maritime professionals.

The consortium, consisting of the University of the Aegean (Greece), Nikola Yonkov Vaptsarov Naval Academy (Bulgaria), TC Piri Reis University (Türkiye), Constanta Maritime University (Romania), Maritime University of Szczecin (Poland), PPP Learn (Greece), and the CPMR – through its Balkan & Black Sea Commission (BBSC), designed a Maritime Case Study Handbook collection, evaluation tools for soft skills based on the Assessment Centre concept, provide the link between academia and industry, and therefore contribute to making maritime professions more appealing and competitive.

Among its deliverables, iSOL-MET organised C3 (Course 3) Training Event, under title “iSOL-MET Assessment Centre”, which took place on 22-24 February 2023, kindly hosted by the Eugenides Foundation at its inspiring premises in Athens, Greece.

The “iSOL-MET Assessment Center” was a short-term event aiming to train all project partners in respect to the Assessment Center procedures. The objective was to organize a full training program for the implementation of assessment tools and a pilot Assessment Center.

During the first day of the events, the iSOL-MET consortium participated in an internal working meeting as part of the “iSOL-MET Assessment Centre”.

The purpose of the event was to discuss the methodology as well as the procedures on implementing a pilot Assessment Centre for soft skills that included individual tasks and interactive simulation exercises between the participants.

The Assessment Centre methodology calls for active participation of students and/or candidates, while their soft skills are being evaluated by assessors based on specific behavioural responses. During the three-day event, students from project partners’ universities participated in the simulation which was based on the different case studies prepared by the consortium.

The details of the programme followed the agenda and was shaped as follows:

C3 EVENT – PARTNERS’ WORKING MEETING ON 22 AND 23 FEBRUARY 2023

It was attended by representatives from all project partners which was fundamental for taking stock and further developing the project. The organised events in Greece allowed partners to reflect on the previous Multiplier Event, organised by the CPMR BBSC in October 2022, in Brussels, as well as to discuss feedback on the IO3 (Intellectual Output) “Guidelines for using case studies as training material for the development of soft skills”.

This report will include details regarding the methods and practices that a trainer should use to train his/her audience on soft skills and competencies. The guidelines focus on the impact of using case studies as training material since they are visible and user-friendly.
The issues discussed during the project meeting will allow the team to build on those reflections in preparation of the Final Conference of the iSOL-MET Project, to be held in Constanta Maritime University (Romania) in May 2023 (more information will be available shortly).

Mr Dimitrios Vintziliaios from PPP Learn went over what the Assessment Centre consists of and presented the instructions to organise a successful Assessment Centre with prospective candidates and/or students. The idea was for assessors to get acquainted with the instructions and prepare for the simulation that was to take place the next day. For the purposes of the simulation project partners were to be Assessors for a day and evaluate the students based on their soft skills.

**Pilot Assessment Centre**

Throughout the next day, students were able to work with the project partners on the implementation of a Pilot Assessment Centre.

This simulation was twofold:

- Phase 1: students worked as individuals on different case studies that they had to present and later discuss with project partners;
- Phase 2: students worked as a team in a make-believe case study where they had to find solutions to a safety issue. Project partners had to observe and assess.

Students were then evaluated based on the following soft skills: analytical and strategic thinking, leadership/safety, social skills, result-driven, and versatility.

Students’ feedback was positive. They rated highly the possibility of learning out of the box and beyond books following an enjoyable process that allowed them to receive knowledge through these different activities of the simulation.

**Stakeholders’ Workshop on 24 February, where the consortium presented a review of the Pilot Assessment Centre to locally based representatives of the industry and various stakeholders**

On the last day of the events the consortium held a stakeholders’ workshop hosted by the Eugenides Foundation to present a review of the pilot Assessment Centre implementation to local stakeholders. After a brief description of the project, its objectives and the final steps presented by Professor Maria Lekakou (University of the Aegean, North and South Aegean Regions (Greece), CPMR BBSC Members), partners had the opportunity to reflect on the Assessment Centre procedure along with stakeholders from the industry.

It was very interesting to review the variety of feedback provided as they build on the current and future project development:

**Students’ feedback:**

Students were asked to rate the procedure (how) and whether the content (what) was related to the maritime industry.

- They were all delighted to participate in the Assessment Centre. They liked the process and felt that the added value from the innovative hands-on learning process would benefit them in the future. They gained experience that would be engrained into their knowledge path and will be useful throughout their careers. They also found useful the process of examining case studies. However, it was pointed out that there is a need for more diverse content in case studies. Examples included case studies from different branches of shipping industry such as from the financial department or the inclusion of Ship owners’, or even banks’, perspectives.

- All students felt that the experience was very interesting, and it would be even advisable for everyone to dare participate in such an interesting training course. It is of great value to “taste” the grounds and go beyond what a book can teach. It would be fascinating to adapt the educational system to include such “hands-on” experiences in universities. Such a direct process allows students to address daily issues with people from the market every day.
They learn about difficulties faced by the crew on board vessels, people’s lives, real life incidents. The case studies are real life occurrences. Such issues and methods should find their way to every European educational curriculum.

Assessors’ feedback: Case studies, interviews
- Assessors had feedback similar to the students regarding the procedure. Their evaluation was based on the main soft skills axes as outlined above.

- They highlighted the innovative character of the social dimension and human factor incorporated in the case studies and agreed that it constitutes a method to train both sides of the industry, that is the industry and the youth. Communicating the challenges and perspectives of the maritime industry directly to students could bridge the youth with the professional life of maritime experts.

- The simulation allowed students to have a feel of what “the real world” looks like outside University desks and walls.

The ISOL-MET Project has been identified by the European Commission as a Black Sea Success Story. It was related to the MINE-EMI Project and the CPMR’s work on maritime education and training.
Supporting Youth Entrepreneurship in Cultural Tourism for coastal communities in the Black Sea Region (CulTourE4Youth) Project aimed to develop a regional paradigm as capacity-building initiator for empowered youth entrepreneurship. Building on the notion that cultural tourism with maritime dimension is an up-and-coming blue growth generator, the project will provide background information and analysis on how youth entrepreneurship is promoted by existing policies and initiatives, and how can it be better supported to address local and regional challenges, such as youth unemployment and brain drain.

It ran under the coordination of the International Centre for Black Sea Studies (ICBSS) in cooperation with CPMR Balkan & Black Sea Commission and the METU Institute of Marine Sciences (METU IMS, Türkiye) and was co-funded by the European Commission under Grant Contract ENI/2020/421-957, coordinated by the BSEC PERMIS.

The activity engaged with young people (18-30y.o.), government agencies, business operators and training institutions in coastal communities in the geographical area of Turkey, Azerbaijan, Georgia, Republic of Moldova, and Ukraine, through analysis and consultation activities. The project used the Mersin Region (Türkiye) as a case study to pursue the above-mentioned objectives and consolidated the results the following events organised by the CPMR BBSC:

CulTourE4Youth International Workshop in Batumi (Ajara Autonomous Republic, Georgia)

Representatives from the wider Black Sea region gathered in Batumi (Ajara Region, Georgia) on the 16 and 17 of February 2022 to discuss strategies to boost the development of cultural tourism for coastal communities in the wider Black Sea region and to support young entrepreneurs.

The International Workshop was kindly hosted by the Autonomous Republic of Ajara and organised by the Balkan & Black Sea Commission (BBSC) of the Conference of Peripheral Maritime Regions (CPMR), in the framework of the “CulTourE4Youth – Supporting Youth Entrepreneurship in Cultural Tourism for coastal communities in the Black Sea region” Project.

The conference was opened by Mr Tornike Rijvadze, Chairman of the Government of Ajara Autonomous Republic and CPMR Vice-President for Neighbourhood Policy, by underlining that “investing in youth is the key to sustainable economic development and local progress. They are the locomotives of the modern world and must be given all the resources necessary for their growth and advancement. We need to give necessary means to promote youth participation in as many economic sectors as possible to achieve ambitious goals, including sustainable cultural tourism”, followed by Mr Cees Loggen, President of the CPMR and Regional Minister of Noord-Holland (The Netherlands), who intervened online and stated that “The CPMR and its members are increasingly investing in policy work and in projects with and for young people. After all, no policy can be sustainable if it does not take young people into account, no project can ensure the capitalization and follow-up of results if young people are not involved in its actions and activities”.
Ms Rositsa Stoeva, Executive Manager in charge of project management, Permanent International Secretariat (PERMIS) of the Organization of the Black Sea Economic Cooperation (BSEC) and Ms Georgia Chantzi, Research and Policy Development Manager at the International Centre for Black Sea Studies (ICBSS), and CulTourE4Youth Coordinator, shared the current outcomes of the project and the different opportunities for further cooperation in this field with the distinguished guests and participants. During the conference, participants addressed a wide range of topics related to sustainable coastal tourism: from the promotion of blue economy in the region to the development of cultural tourism and the incentive of young entrepreneurship.

Some 100 participants attended this hybrid event, mainly from Georgia and the wider Black Sea region (Azerbaijan, Bulgaria, Greece, Republic of Moldova, Romania, Turkey, and Ukraine) but also from beyond (France, Italy, Spain, the United Kingdom, and Uruguay). Regional and local authorities engaged in a debate with representatives from the EU Institutions and other international organisations, academia, the business sector, and young entrepreneurs.

The BBSC showcased CulTourE4Youth project outcomes, collaborated with other CPMR Geographical Commissions in tourism, identified potential areas for cooperation, and laid the groundwork for future steps and leveraging CulTourE4Youth's results.

The workshop was preceded by a study visit to the Bioaroma Crete fields and facilities to showcase a concrete example of how the cultural heritage of a region and its exchanges with other coastal regions in the wider region and neighbouring sea basins can be capitalised by young entrepreneurs so that they stay and invest in their region, therefore tackling brain drain and including different social groups in a wider array of entrepreneurial activities. Bioaroma Crete, founded in 2007 in Agios Nikolaos, Crete, is a pioneering organic cosmetics and perfumes company, environmentally friendly with sustainable development.

The CulTourE4Youth project was related to the CPMR’s work on maritime & coastal tourism.
The overall objective of SolaQua was to increase the share of renewable energy consumption in Europe by facilitating the market uptake of solar irrigation in the agricultural sector.

This project was in line with the European climate ambition to significantly reduce CO2 emissions by 2030. Indeed, the current energy model for irrigation, based on fossil fuels, has a high environmental cost; it produces about 15% of the EU’s total CO2 emissions from agriculture.

Although the potential of solar irrigation to change the energy model of European agriculture is great, the market uptake of solar irrigation is hampered by a number of non-technological barriers that this project attempted to address.

The SolaQua project was funded under the European Horizon 2020 research programme and ran from October 2020 to October 2023. The SolaQua consortium was composed of 11 solar irrigation stakeholders, among them Calarasi County Council, CPMR BBSC Member Region, (Romania), from 7 Euro-Mediterranean countries, highly specialised and capable of addressing the technical, economic and regulatory challenges for the adoption of the solar irrigation market: universities, sectoral organisations of irrigators at European level, SMEs in the agricultural engineering sector, an insurance company and public authorities.

On 29 and 30 March 2023, Calarasi County Council, our BBSC member, hosted the project’s steering committee to discuss advancements and plan the last six months of the project. One of the key aspects discussed was how to ensure that the Financial Instrument is properly implemented in the regions of Comunitat Valenciana (Spain), Aragon (Spain), Calarasi (Romania) and other CPMR Members beyond the project.

This two-day meeting started with a presentation of the deliverable Policy Solar Irrigation action, prepared by the CPMR Intermediterranean Commission. This report summarises the plans of Aragon (Spain), Valencia (Spain) and Călărași (Romania) to facilitate the introduction of photovoltaic irrigation systems (PVIs) in their respective socio-economic ecosystems and the development of an efficient market for this technology through the implementation of specific actions.

The document was produced based on deliverables:
- 12 “Legal Analyses and Best Practices”, where the existing legislation and practices in the different Mediterranean countries are analysed, and
- 13 “EAFRD Financial Instrument for Rural Development” which includes the actions to be carried out by regional/national authorities to implement the Financial Instrument (FI) in the Rural Development Programmes (RDP).
The authorities of the targeted regions have identified the main obstacles of their legislation and they have picked some recommendations that should be followed. As a result, possible actions are to be implemented, such as the organisation of info sessions addressed to irrigators to raise awareness about the Financial Instrument (FI) and its advantages.

Lastly, to conclude on the steering committee held in Calarasi, a visit to the local farm ‘Ivanestis’ took place, envisioning where a photovoltaic irrigation system (PVIs) could be potentially installed. This visit allowed the partners to explain first-hand to the local farmers about its multiple advantages and why green transition is so urgent.

Calarasi County Council has been also responsible for the dissemination of the project’s results and examination of possible replication in the Balkan & Black Sea regions, in close cooperation with the CPMR Balkan & Black Sea Commission’s Secretariat.
Advancing Black Sea Research and Innovation to co-Develop Blue Growth within Resilient Ecosystems (BRIDGE-BS)

Project is a 54-month project funded under Horizon2020 Programme and led by the Middle East Technical University Institute of Marine Sciences (METU IMS) (Turkey).

BRIDGE-BS will be implemented by addressing the respective goals of the Black Sea Common Maritime Agenda (CMA) and the Strategic Research and Innovation Agenda (SRIA).

BRIDGE-BS proposes a multidisciplinary, multisectoral program building on regional and international initiatives as a critical contribution to the science-based policy needed to preserve the Black Sea ecosystems for the benefit of citizens dependent upon their sustainability.

The project will develop predictive tools and capabilities necessary to understand and predict the impacts of climate-driven and anthropogenic multi-stressors on the services stemming from Black Sea ecosystems. These services and their responses to stressors will be mapped, monitored, and modelled to identify a safe operating space within which a sustainable blue economy can flourish. To this end, BRIDGE-BS is structured around “three” interconnected nodes: Service Dynamics, Blue Growth Incubators and Empowered Citizens.

Among its activities, BRIDGE-BS will train and strengthen collaborations between scientists and stakeholders, as well as policymakers, industry representatives and societal interest groups. It will also educate, train and stimulate interactions between the public, future generations of marine scientists and entrepreneurs as well as motivate and engage policymakers, aiming to create a connected Black Sea community, strengthened by a new generation of researchers and innovators to address emerging Black Sea challenges.

The major events organised so far have been:

HIGH-TECH SUMMIT FOR THE BLACK SEA (HTS4BS) ON 27-28 SEPTEMBER 2022, IN VARNA (BULGARIA)

Under the umbrella of the H2020 funded BRIDGES-BS RIA, the Blue Economy High Tech Summit for the Black Sea was a large research-based Black Sea forum on ocean digitalization and Industry 4.0 across academia, research organizations, investors, industry, and society at large.

It provided a meeting point for industry and research to generate and incubate ideas for future blue economy innovative services, potentially across the various relevant economic activities for the Black Sea.

It was organised to create a supportive environment for companies, start-ups, organisations and universities to exchange, present and discuss their latest technological developments, debate the most recent discoveries, participate in matchmaking events, and generate business ideas.
The Science – Policy Dialogue Forum for a Sustainable Blue Economy in the Black Sea was held successfully in Thessaloniki (Greece), on 29 March 2023, organised by the International Centre for Black Sea Studies (ICBSS), under the Horizon 2020-funded BRIDGE – BS project. The Science–Policy Dialogue Forum brought together scientists and policy stakeholders from the wider Black Sea region to exchange on key cross-cutting issues in established and emerging blue economy sectors in the Black Sea.

The event was developed in three rounds of thematic Working Groups (WGs) of moderated discussions, focusing on i) multistressors on the Black Sea ecosystem, ii) innovation & entrepreneurship, iii) ocean literacy, capacity building & skills, enabling an interactive, constructive dialogue based on actual needs and priorities.

Opening the event on behalf of the organisers, Ms Georgia Chantzi, ICBSS Research and Policy Development Manager, underlined the importance of a continuous science-policy exchange to support science-based policy-making in the region and highlighted the inclusive and tailor-made approach of the BRIDGE-BS project towards this direction.

Keynote speech was delivered by the BRIDGE-BS project co-coordinator, Prof. Dr Mustafa Yücel, Vice Director of the Institute of Marine Sciences of Middle East Technical University (METU IMS) outlining the main features of the BRIDGE-BS project and stressed the project’s critical contribution to the science-based policy needed to preserve the Black Sea ecosystems.

In addition, Dr Yücel presented the regional cooperation frameworks that aim to support substantially the sustainable development of Blue Economy in the Black Sea, such as the Black Sea Common Maritime Agenda (CMA) and the Black Sea Strategic Research and Innovation Agenda (SRIA).

The Science–Policy Dialogue Forum hosted fifty regional and international stakeholders, i.e., policy-makers, policy-delivery stakeholders, researchers, business and academia representatives involved in the blue economy sectors from Black Sea and European countries. Special emphasis was placed on establishing a science-policy synergy that will facilitate a continuous two-way exchange and further follow-up actions, even beyond the BRIDGE-BS project’s duration.

The CPMR BBSC participated actively in the BRIDGE-BS Science-Policy Dialogue Forum in Thessaloniki, together with stakeholders from BBSC Member Regions (e.g., University of the Aegean – North and South Aegean Regions, Greece) and other CPMR Member Regions (e.g., University of Piraeus – Attica Region, Greece).
The 2nd General Assembly of the H2020-funded project BRIDGE-BS was held in Ankara (Türkiye), on 27-29 September 2023, kindly hosted by the Middle East Technical University (METU), project coordinator, at their amazing campus. More than seventy participants from 31 partners from EU and Black Sea countries had the opportunity to engage in fruitful discussions and exchanges on the next steps of the BRIDGE-BS project, which aims to provide tools and services for a safe operating space for Blue Economy.

The BBSC is mainly involved in WP8 on science-policy dialogue for a sustainable blue economy in the Black Sea, led by the ICBSS and co-led by CETMAR, both long-standing CPMR partners.

The BRIDGE-BS project is related to the CPMR maritime policy work.
DYNAMIC START TO 2024

THIS SECTION INCLUDES:
ANNUAL SUMMIT OF THE B40 BALKAN CITIES NETWORK
TOURAL PROJECT
CUL-MAR-SKILLS
Mr Fokion Zaimis, Deputy Governor of Western Greece Region and 1st Vice-President of our BBSC, participated in the Tirana Summit of the B40 Balkan Cities Network, held on 29-31 January 2024.

B40 Balkan Cities Network was established with the Istanbul Declaration signed by 23 mayors at the end of the Istanbul Summit (Türkiye) held on 29-30 November 2021 with a “Better Future, Better Cooperation” motto. B40 Network aims to bring together the local governments in the Balkans, an essential region, by forming the Eastern borders of the European Union and the western leg of Eurasia. The mayors and their accompanying delegations discussed the future of local government, joint solutions to local problems, and potential cooperation areas.

The Tirana Summit, kindly hosted by the Mayor of Tirana Municipality, Mr Erion Veliaj, under the title “Building Urban Resilience and Responding to Crises” welcomed mayors and delegations from 54 Balkan cities, expressing the need for direct and continuous communication.

“We discussed the future of local government, the possibility of finding common solutions to local problems and possible ways of cooperation. As Balkan & Black Sea Commission of the CPMR, we would be very much interested in establishing a concrete cooperation with your network, through a Memorandum of Understanding for instance, to join forces and work together in a common framework to achieve better results for the local and regional communities we all represent. To this end, we could also bring in our experience from the Mediterranean region and encourage closer cooperation with our respective peers.” stressed Mr Zaimis.

In the framework of the Tirana Summit, the BBSC 1st Vice-President had the opportunity to discuss with Mr Ekrem İmamoğlu – Mayor of Istanbul (Türkiye), Mr Harris Doukas – Mayor of Athens (Region of Attica, Greece), Mr Ioannis Zamboukis – Mayor of Alexandroupolis and Mr Stathis Fountoukidis – Mayor of Orestiada (Region of Eastern Macedonia and Thrace, Greece), and Mr Diamantis Papadopoulos – Mayor of Pella (Region of Central Macedonia, Greece).
COOPERATION PROJECTS – NEW ARRIVALS!

“NEW TOURISM MODELS FOR THE SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT OF RURAL & REMOTE AREAS” – TOURAL PROJECT

The EU-funded TOURAL Project (Multidimensional model of tourism verticals driving the sustainable balanced growth among rural & remote grids and urban clusters of rural regions, fostering macroregional cooperation) held its online kick-off meeting, on Wednesday 24 January 2024.

The TOURAL Project focuses on cultural and creative tourism as drivers for sustainable development, paying at the same time a premium to the EU Tourism Transition Pathway requirements, within the context of smart multi-destination and multi-dimensional tourism offerings empowered by macro-regional tourism cooperation. TOURAL proposes a model to support the touristic development of the participating rural regions, balancing the growth of their urban clusters with the untapped growth potential of their remote and rural cells. The scope of foreseen interventions includes three regions from the Adriatic-Ionian Macroring (Croatia, Greece, Italy), and three regions from the Black Sea Basin (Bulgaria, Romania, Ukraine). TOURAL targets multiple tourism niche sectors, namely underwater, cultural & natural heritage tourism, cultural & creative tourism, cultural science tourism, and silver tourism.

The project will run for 36 months, and consists of 20 partners coming from Bulgaria, Croatia, France, Greece, Italy, Romania, Türkiye, and Ukraine, under the coordination of the Centre for Research & Technology Hellas/CERTH (Greece).

The CPMR is involved in the TOURAL Project through its Balkan & Black Sea Commission, supporting the policy work, communication, dissemination, and engagement activities throughout the project’s duration. The CPMR will do so by merging its previous relevant experience on creative industries, sustainable tourism, and regional cooperation among others with the valuable input stemming from its Member Regions.

Among the TOURAL partners, there are Abruzzo Region, CPMR IMC Member, and the Association Local Action Group Danube Delta (GAL DD) located in Tulcea, CPMR BBSC Presidency.

There are also two Ukrainian partners, bringing in their needs and priorities that could be taken into consideration for the CPMR’s work on solidarity with Ukraine.

The TOURAL Project has received funding from the European Union’s Horizon Europe Programme, under Grant Agreement No 101132489.
**CUL-MAR-SKILLS (MARITIME SOFT SKILLS FOR ONBOARD HEALTHY NUTRITION AND CULINARY ARTS IN SEAGOING SERVICES)**

*CUL-MAR-Skills* is an Erasmus+ project aimed at meeting the need for trained personnel to work in the galleys of all ships. The project, coordinated by the Romanian Naval Academy “Mircea cel Batran”, will provide training in areas such as balanced and healthy nutrition, provisions, environmentally friendly practices in the galley and waste management. In addition, a maritime cookbook consisting of traditional maritime recipes will be created to keep the maritime cultural food heritage alive. The BBSC is mainly responsible for the dissemination of the project’s deliverables.

This project is related to the CPMR’s work on maritime education and training.

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**CRETE VALLEY: A NEW PROJECT TO PIONEER THE FIRST RENEWABLE ENERGY VALLEY IN EUROPE (A CPMR PROJECT)**

*Crete Valley* is an EU-funded Horizon Europe project aiming to transform Crete into a sustainable, decentralised energy system by 2028.

The project is led by the Institute of Communication & Computer Systems of the National Technical University of Athens (ICCS) (Greece) and brings together 41 partners from across all of Europe.

*CRETE VALLEY* foresees creating a Renewable Energy Valley ‘Living Lab’ (REV-Lab), combining leading-edge ICT technologies (Internet of Things, Artificial Intelligence, DLT/blockchain, big data, Augmented Reality) with a social/behavioural dimension, and easy-to-adopt efficient business models. *CRETE VALLEY* will demonstrate, in real-life conditions, the sustainable and cost-effective production and storage of renewable energy to cover the Island’s yearly energy needs.

The CPMR involvement will be mainly related to the dissemination and capitalisation of the project results:
- Light follow-up of the overall implementation of the project and admin monitoring.
- Organisation of one or two policy events – this kind of event should be organized back-to-back with CPMR meeting(s).
- Support in the development/preparation of the Capacity Building – this action will be open to our members.

The BBSC will focus on the dissemination and capitalisation of the project results in the Adriatic-Ionian, Balkan, and Black Sea regions and support its members’ exchanges with key partners involved.
THE CONFERENCE OF PERIPHERAL MARITIME REGIONS (CPMR) REPRESENTS MORE THAN 150 REGIONAL AUTHORITIES FROM 24 COUNTRIES ACROSS EUROPE AND BEYOND. ORGANISED IN GEOGRAPHICAL COMMISSIONS, THE CPMR WORKS TO ENSURE THAT A BALANCED TERRITORIAL DEVELOPMENT IS AT THE HEART OF THE EUROPEAN UNION AND ITS POLICIES. THE CPMR IS PRESENT IN THE WIDER BLACK SEA REGION THROUGH ITS BALKAN AND BLACK SEA COMMISSION.