



CONFERENCE OF PERIPHERAL MARITIME
REGIONS

**BALKAN & BLACK SEA
REGIONAL COMMISSION**



MINUTES

Meeting of the BBSRC Tourism and Business cooperation Working Groups

28 May 2015, Brussels

1. Meeting of the Working Group on Tourism

Mr Miltiadis Nikolaou, Member of the coordinating team of the Working Group on Tourism, Region of Central Macedonia, Greece, and Moderator of this Session welcomed all participants to the meeting and invited the Deputy Governor of Central Macedonia Region, Mr Ioannis Giorgos to deliver a short speech.

Mr Ioannis Giorgos, Deputy Governor of Central Macedonia Region, expressed his pleasure to represent the Region of Central Macedonia and the Regional Governor, Mr Apostolos Tzitzikostas. Mr Giorgos provided information about the administrative structure, population, geographical, environmental, historical, cultural, gastronomical richness and excellent quality products of Central Macedonia, and invited all participants to [visit Central Macedonia Region](#).

Ms Evi Dermedesioti, Member of the coordinating team of the Working Group on Tourism, Department of Tourism, Region of Central Macedonia, thanked all participants for their presence and contribution to achieving this common aim. Ms Dermedesioti underlined the sustainable and responsible tourism potential of the Balkan and Black Sea area, through innovative and quality tourism products, services, and efficient management mechanisms together with alleviating seasonality will be the aim of this Working Group.

Ms Dermedesioti [presented](#) the state of play of the Tourism WG and concluded by stressing that its main goal is to stress our similarities and interesting differences that should encourage us to visit one each other and others visit us.

Mr Miltiadis Nikolaou [presented](#) the next steps of the Tourism WG, under the coordination of the Region of Central Macedonia, stating that cross-sectoral cooperation is the major driving force. He referred to the project proposals that are under preparation together with the CPMR. Ensuring that regional policies actively contribute to a positive identification of the European projects while enhancing a strong essence of European identity among the European citizens, is not only a general statement, but also essential in terms of global positioning of the European economy. He said that the implementation of such projects is expected to bring cohesion to our Region, and that the main challenge expected for the next period will relate to shaping project coordination adequately for greater consistency and speeding up results and achievements.

Ms Cinzia De Marzo, Policy Officer, Directorate-General for Internal Market, Industry, Entrepreneurship and SMEs, European Commission, in her [presentation](#) referred to the legal framework of the EU competences in tourism and presented the main priorities for 2015-2020 to keep EU tourism competitive and sustainable, as well as the actions enhancing sustainable tourism in the EU.

These actions are the European Tourism Indicator System (ETIS), the European Charter for sustainable and responsible tourism, and the diversification of European tourism products capitalising on Europe's rich cultural and natural heritage. She underlined the importance of accessibility in tourism and ensuring tourism for all, since European tourism is losing €140 billion every year due to a lack of accessible tourism facilities, and closed her presentation with the latest funding opportunities (up to 75% co-financed by the European Commission and 25% covered by the transnational consortia).

Ms Şenay Çekiç, T.R. Trakya Development Agency, Coordinator of Kırklareli Investment Support Office, Turkey, mentioned that the geographical position of Thrace (Greece, Turkey, Bulgaria) allows the creation of a common transnational destination. The local tourism platform created in Turkey includes representatives from Local Authorities, District Directorates, and cultural tourism, that are working together on the creation of a transnational destination and she asked Ms De Marzo how we could integrate and include our destinations in the ETIS and how this system will evolve. **Mr Andrei Buzatu**, Coordinator of the Union of County Councils of the Republic of Moldova in Brussels, asked whether Moldovan Local Authorities can be involved within the transnational projects and apply as partners, and if there is an agreement on standards at European level. **Mr Sergei Bezdolnii**, former President of the International Black Sea Club (IBSC), Chairman of Duma – Head of City of Azov, Russia, asked whether Russian cities and towns have the opportunity to take part in this programme.

Ms Cinzia De Marzo answered that in November, when the new version of the system is launched, all destinations within Europe will be informed and invited to use it. Applications will be monitored and active applicant Regions will appear on the map. Information on the upcoming relevant conference will be disseminated in due course. Regarding Mr Buzatu's question, Ms De Marzo answered positively and said the European Commission looks for a consortium based on public and private partnership. In terms of standards, there is no standardisation (i.e. quality label) at European level but an interest to provide quality services. Regarding Mr Bezdolnii's question, she explained that bilateral agreements between the European Commission and the countries are needed, and Russia so far does not have this agreement.

Mr George Drakopoulos, Special Adviser to the Secretary General of the World Tourism Organisation (UNWTO), European Economic and Social Committee, reminded participants in his [presentation](#) that the UNWTO acts and encourages people to respect local culture, buy local, save energy, use public transport and protect heritage, and in general be a friendly tourist who respects the destination. Sustainability depends on governments, Regional and Local Authorities, as people are not enough to ensure it. The answer to the question "is culture important in terms of business", is "yes", since it is the main ingredient in city breaks and touring, which count for more than half a billion European outbound trips on an annual basis. Mr Drakopoulos mentioned that apart from cultural heritage there are some other aspects which can be developed and can be approached as tourism products that can be found in every country (e.g. lifestyle elements such as gastronomy, which is not sensitive on a seasonal basis, all European regions have to demonstrate something good in terms of gastronomy, it links the primary and the services sector, and does not need huge investment, just marketing and action). In order to improve the cultural product offer, the Black Sea area should encourage collaboration of administrative and political, functional, and technical levels. Regarding branding, he proposed that instead of branding area by area in the Black Sea, it might be a good idea to produce and brand a transnational product.

Dr Apostolos Papafotiou, Regional Councillor of Peloponnese, Greece, in charge of International Relations and European Programmes, claimed that in terms of branding we should start from the name of the Black Sea, which has a negative connotation and proposed to reintroduce the ancient Greek name "Efxinos Pontos" (Hospitable Sea). This name would underline the friendship and hospitality of all peoples of this sea basin.

Mr George Drakopoulos answered that branding is not considered the number one priority in the Black Sea, but improving travel facilitation (i.e. connectivity and issuing visas).

Mr Dimitrios Papailiou, Maritime Transport Attaché at the Permanent Representation of Greece to the EU, agreed that ensuring accessibility and connectivity is a priority in this area.

Mr Sergei Bezdolnii referred to the history of the city of Azov, Rostov Oblast, and to the importance of the tourism sector promoted by the Department of Tourism. Mr Bezdolnii underlined the role of the IBSC, an organisation of 29 member cities from 9 countries, which also collaborate a lot in the tourism

area. He stressed that everything that we have heard today cannot be applied separately. All the things that have already been mentioned are extremely important, especially infrastructure and branding names that need to be attractive, but we also need to work on the visa regime that needs to be open and accessible. In the IBSC a decision was made to appeal to governments to liberalise the visa regime as that would increase the economic development and the development of tourism in the Black Sea. He underlined that a common effort is needed in order to respond to all of the challenges in all the area.

Dr Zefi Dimadama, Director General, International Centre for Black Sea Studies (ICBSS), Athens, Greece, in her [presentation](#) briefly introduced the work of the ICBSS, the recognised think tank of the organisation of the Black Sea Economic Cooperation (BSEC). She referred to the state of the tourism industry in the Region and presented how the ICBSS tries to capitalise on the experience of the green cluster network and encourage tourism initiatives and youth entrepreneurship in the Black Sea area. She highlighted the importance of helping youth to stay in the Region and work at the local and regional level, and of attracting investors at local, regional and national levels, additionally to foreign investors. Science, technology, education, innovation and knowledge offer different opportunities for youth entrepreneurship, and encouraging multilateral rather than bilateral collaboration is very important for youth, tourism, and entrepreneurship. Dr Dimadama concluded by underlining the role of the governance on tourism and how we can join forces and bring together different stakeholders from local and regional levels to collaborate.

Dr Apostolos Papafotiou noticed the gap between the GDP and the total global service trade in Dr Dimadama's presentation. **Dr Dimadama** explained that this gap has to do with the lack of balance between the services and the products and how we evaluate them, mentioning also the monetary and financial differences in every country. The ICBSS has more analytical data to provide.

Ms Ilze Atanasova, Chair of the Board of Marine Cluster Bulgaria, sent a video [presentation](#) on issues of maritime training in the Black Sea area: Yacht style cruising and standardisation of skippers' qualifications.

Ms Şenay Çekiç, T.R. Trakya Development Agency, Coordinator of Kırklareli Investment Support Office, Turkey, [presented](#) the tourism opportunities in Thrace, a geographically exceptional Region, surrounded by three seas, with ancient history, conserved nature and rich culture that offer a vast diversification of tourism products. Trakya Development Agency, established in July 2009, where 35 specialists and 4 support employees work in 8 different languages, is very active in the support of developing tourism at both local and interregional level. She underlined Trakya Development Agency's interest to exchange ideas with different stakeholders and find future partners to collaborate on project proposals in the area.

Ms Roxana Iacob, Project Management Consultant, Tulcea, Danube Delta Area, Romania, was unable to participate and [present](#) sustainable tourism in Danube Delta Biosphere Reserve, due to flight problems.

Mr Miltiadis Nikolaou, invited participants to contact the CPMR/BBSRC Secretariat for any questions they may have for the speakers and after thanking all speakers and participants for their productive participation concluded the session.

2. Meeting of the Working Group on Business Cooperation

Mr Berkol Alevli, T.R. North Anatolian Development Agency, Coordinator Investment Support Office, Sinop, and Advisor to the CPMR Secretary General for questions relating to the Turkish Maritime Provinces and Metropolitan Municipalities, coordinator of the Business Cooperation WG, could not participate in the meeting.

Therefore, **Mr Stavros Kalognomos**, CPMR Policy Officer from the BBSRC Secretariat, briefly [presented](#) the state of play and the next steps of the Working Group on Business Cooperation.

Mr Murat Daoudov, President of the Middle East Development Network, Turkey, apologised for not being able to participate by skype due to technical difficulties and made his speech by telephone. He highlight several areas of key importance including cooperation across the Black Sea and the expectations to play a dual role including being an actor of economic development. He explained that

the Black Sea was not always united, but sometimes divided especially in relation to the inter-connections between services and business across the Black Sea region. He listed the several main obstacles that need to be overcome in order for the Black Sea region to become a well-connected integrated economic region. Interregional trade and cooperation are needed to help businesses work across borders. Focus should be on the cross-border dimension rather than the domestic dimension to be able to operate across borders and actively contribute to overcoming problems. He explained that some countries have been able to innovate to ease the burden. He pointed out the need for a regional framework for cooperation to exchange best practice and experience. He concluded by referring to youth entrepreneurship that is expected to play a role to unleash the potential for cooperation and stressed there should be special focus on youth entrepreneurship and the potential to make a major contribution to the economic development of the Region.

Mr Konstantinos Tsiakataras, Deputy Managing Director of DIADIKASIA Business Consultants S.A., Greece, in his [presentation](#) on increasing business cooperation and entrepreneurship through interregional networking, referred to the barriers to entrepreneurship in the wider Black Sea area and to the tools for business cooperation.

Mr Tsiakataras presented a case study aiming to design and develop a training programme for the enhancement of the competitive advantage of SMEs that could be implemented in the BBSRC area. He mentioned that through the Chambers of Commerce a wide range of SMEs are approachable and the possibility of combining activities. With regard to the public-private partnership, the legal and financial limitations as well as political willingness have to be dealt with so that the partnership is achieved.

Ms Natalia Budescu, President of the NGDO Platform, FOND, Black Sea NGO Forum, and Director of the Association for Cross-Border Cooperation "Lower Danube Euroregion", Romania, [presented](#) social entrepreneurship in the wider Black Sea area. She underlined the role of NGOs as a force, and not only as a tool. Mapping the stakeholders and the opportunities should be a priority, since every challenge faced has an opportunity. In order to obtain sustainability, we should be based on what we already have, innovation through modern technologies, and long-term planning. NGOs are a sustainable partnership and can contribute to the creation of sustainable relationships. She highlighted that the Black Sea NGO Forum is not an instrument but a successful business, free of administrative and political decision, as well as the revenues burden, and it is there to share knowledge and expertise. To **Mr Miltiadis Nikolaou** questions about how business cooperation relates to tourism businesses in order to jointly participate in such projects and if tourism projects address only the private sector or are open to the public sector as well, Ms Budescu answered that this type of projects requires the collaboration of public, private and civil sectors, and that tourism is part of the business and may take different forms such as products (e.g. medical, etc.). However, isolated business products are not sufficient and have to be within the framework of an integrated tourism business.

Mr Sergei Bezdolny, former President of the International Black Sea Club (IBSC), Chairman of Duma, Head of City of Azov, Russia, represented Rostov Oblast, one of the most dynamically developing Regions in Russia. The IBSC, created in order to foster and develop business cooperation between port cities of the wider Black Sea area, has observer status in the BSEC and consultative status in the ECOSOC of the UN. During his [presentation](#) he stressed that wherever we find ourselves within the political cycle, we will always have the commonality of economic interest related to business activities in the wider Black Sea basin, a geographically natural integration group, and consequently, importance should be on developing infrastructure, especially on the transport sector, in order to increase competitiveness in the Region. He highlighted the geographical importance of Azov as an import-export window to the whole of the European part of Russia as well as Kazakhstan and the Caspian Sea (more than 500 million consumers in total; moreover, Rostov Oblast transits 40% of the export of all Russian agriculture). Due to this advantageous geographical position, Rostov Oblast is a transport and logistical hub for 6 Eurasian transport corridors, including maritime, river, rail, road, and air connections. He mentioned that despite all the political turbulence, there is a sustained trend towards transnational and trans-regional development of businesses, and invited participants to support mutual investment and mutual trade as it is beneficial to our business and therefore to our citizens. He concluded by wondering if we will be able to catch up with what has been lost economically, once the political turbulence has passed.

Mr Patrick Anvroin, CPMR Director responsible for Transport and follow-up of the BBSRC, thanked Mr Bezdolny for his presentation and mentioned that one of the priorities of this Commission is to launch a specific Working Group dealing with transport and accessibility. **Mr Bezdolny** welcomed the idea of a BBSRC Transport and Accessibility Working Group.

Dr Apostolos Papafotiou said that on one hand we have the European Union that puts high restrictions on trade with Russia, and on the other hand we have the USA who is highly connected in terms of trade with Russia. We should take this fact into consideration and enhance our political relationships. **Mr Bezdolny** agreed.

Mr Andrei Buzatu, asked whether Rostov Oblast has a policy of incentives and if they practice joint ventures investments. **Mr Bezdolny** replied positively and explained that legislation says that if you invest over a certain sum, for the period of your investment you will get a tax holiday (e.g. regional taxes for land use).

Dr Zefi Dimadama, asked if there is an environmental policy in Rostov Oblast's approach to integration projects, and how the private sector, the NGOs and the companies that work together have these standards in the field of horizontal environmental approach.

Mr Bezdolny answered that all projects across Russia have to meet with some environmental standards and undergo preliminary environmental assessment.