



# Minutes

June 2017

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## 2017 BBSC General Assembly

24 May 2017, Serres (Central Macedonia, GR)

**Mr Alexandros Thanos**, Vice-Governor in charge of Tourism and Culture, Region of Central Macedonia, welcomed all participants, on behalf of the Regional Governor, Mr Apostolos Tzitzikostas.

The Region of Central Macedonia is the coordinator of the [BBSC Working Group on Tourism](#). He reminded participants that through the extended network of the CPMR, the Members have the opportunity to exchange best practices and to enrich their network and collaboration opportunities.

The geographical position of Central Macedonia places it as a tourism destination for both Black and Mediterranean Seas and it therefore acts as a bridge between these two seas. Central Macedonia is Greece's gateway to the Balkans, with a strong transport network, roads and railways that connect it to the mainland, the Balkans and Europe. Being a strong political, economic and industrial centre in northern Greece, Central Macedonia holds primary advantages for the development of the region and the promotion for the dynamic growth of Thessaloniki as a metropolis of the Balkans.

In accordance with its strategic priorities, the Region of Central Macedonia brings together all those conditions to become a strong European and regional tourism destination. It can bring together its resources in order to continuously achieve year-round tourism and not solely seasonal. The combination of these benefits can enhance the socio-economic activity and sustainability of the Region, achieving high-level and high-quality tourism. The development of different types of tourism can provide continuous tourism throughout the year.

Last but not least, Vice-Governor Thanos expressed his warmest thanks to the organisers of the 1<sup>st</sup> Balkans & Black Sea Cooperation Forum and wished participants success and a fruitful exchange of knowledge.

**Ms Eleni Marianou**, CPMR Secretary General, thanked all participants for coming to the CPMR Balkan & Black Sea Commission Annual General Assembly. Ms Marianou underlined the fact that it is an area of geo-political challenges and expressed the hope that the Romanian Presidency of the EU in 2019 with the new Commission and the new Parliament will be a good follow-up of the work that we try to do together.

The CPMR Secretary General specified that this particular session concentrates on the financial opportunities of the use of financial engineering and financial instruments by the regions to implement projects, and reminded participants that in recent months, the European Commission

and particularly Mr Jyrki Katainen, Commissioner for Jobs, Growth, Investment and Competitiveness has been pushing for an increased use of EU funds and financial instruments in projects that Regions can implement.

**Mr Evangelos Antonaros**, Senior Policy Officer, European Investment Bank ([EIB](#)), thanked participants for the kind invitation and for the opportunity to take part in this event. He underlined that the EIB is the bank of the EU and is its financial arm. He explained its role and functions, stressing that the EIB works closely with the 28 EU countries and the European Commission.

Mr Antonaros informed participants that until a few years ago, the funds of the EIB were going mostly to the public sector and to infrastructure investments. The new trend the EIB is following is to build up its corporate lending, which remains an uneasy task. The main task the EIB has been given by its Management Committee and Board of Governors, consisting of 28 EU Finance Ministers, is to concentrate mainly on the private sector of the economy without neglecting the public sector.

The EIB works closely with the local banking sector with which a global loan agreement was signed providing companies the liquidity they very often lack to support their projects, which is essential for them to establish themselves and grow in the local market, but also beyond the borders of the country. Some of asset criteria are the eligibility, export orientation, creation of new jobs and research. He reminded participants that there is no quota for any country, however it is essential to present a bankable proposal, that the EIB might be able to support.

Mr Antonaros stressed the availability of the organisation and their staff for each interested party to present a business or project proposal to be discussed. Granted credits can reach up to 50% of the value of an investment project. The willingness is to support companies especially in countries with very low liquidities, where the companies cannot otherwise have fresh money.

He added that recently, the EIB has been financing projects with a higher risk factor thanks to the “Juncker Plan” which is directed to companies with a higher risk, which commercial banks would not usually lend the money to easily.

**Ms Georgia Chantzi**, Research Fellow, International Centre for Black Sea Studies (ICBSS), in her [presentation entitled “Black Sea Horizon Project: Stimulating STI Cooperation”](#) briefly introduced the ICBSS and explained that the EU promotes the Black Sea Horizon as there is a great potential of the Black Sea Region countries in Science, Technology and Innovation (STI).

Ms Chantzi stated the wealth of human capital, tech parks, incubators, and many Black Sea researchers who are interested in progressing and developing their works and research further. However, they all face the challenges of brain drain and lack of funds. In addition, there is the Black Sea Horizon, a three-year project funded by the Horizon 2020 (H2020).

The ICBSS is working on the elaboration of a jointly funded Call, “EU-Black Sea Cooperation Programme”, which represents one of the main objectives of the BSH programme. It contributes to the four main aims: enhancing intra-regional STI cooperation, participating in the European Research Area (ERA) and H2020, contributing to the EU-BS bi-regional dialogue, and creating synergies with other programmes.

Ms Chantzi informed participants that the first draft was presented at the Policy Stakeholders Conference, in Athens, on 8 May 2017. The discussion is still ongoing and she invited participants to get in contact with ICBSS staff to contribute to the elaboration of this joint Call to be launched in January 2018 through the involvement of a large variety of stakeholders like programme owners, Research Performing Organisations, Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs), EU Member States, international organisations, etc.

**Ms Anastasia Chatzinikolaou**, Development Consultant, European Centre for Byzantine and Post-Byzantine Monuments (EKBMM), presented the “[Black Sea Cultural Port](#)” in action, as a good example of the use of financial instruments.

The “Institution of Cultural Ports of the Black Sea” is proposed as an innovative tool in order to promote the city ports of the Black Sea and their cultural treasures with the aim to support cultural tourism development around the Black Sea city ports. The Cultural Port of the Black Sea is inspired by the institution of the European Capital of Culture, and aims to reimagine the connections between the city ports and urban creativity. The proposed institution is developed in order to establish institutionalised cooperation between the city ports, to develop a cultural touristic economic network, to improve management capacity at local level and to support synergies with business sectors involved in tourism and cultural management.

**Dr Apostolos Papafotiou**, Regional Councillor of Peloponnese (GR) in charge of European and International Programmes, was very pleased to see Ms Chatzinikolaou’s presentation and underlined the importance of creating a network of ports. According to him, this successful initiative could serve as an example to other networks such as ancient theatres etc., and could be extended in different directions. **Eleni Marianou** stressed the importance of involving both the public and private sectors and creating cultural routes.

### Statutory Session

**Ms Christiana Kalogirou**, Regional Governor of the North Aegean (GR), Acting President of the CPMR Balkan & Black Sea Commission, [opened](#) the statutory session and welcomed participants. She reminded participants that the economic and migration crisis the European Union has faced over these last few years, that directly affected its Member States and the Regions. She provided an update on major activities and events that the BBSC is involved in, in the field of blue growth, migration, sustainable tourism, transport, and new financial tools. The Commission is acting to mobilise its Members and also potential new members. She underlined that the BBSC started working recently on agriculture and that the BBSC continues to develop projects in this area of work and monitors future Call for Proposals.

The [draft minutes of the Pre-General Assembly meeting](#) held on 3<sup>rd</sup> November 2016 in Ponta Delgada (Azores, PT) were unanimously adopted.

**Mr Stavros Kalognomos**, CPMR Policy Officer, presented the [2016-2017 Activity Report](#) ([see PowerPoint presentation](#)).

Firstly, he summarised the latest key activities of the CPMR BBSC. The CPMR and the Organisation of the Black Sea Economic Cooperation (BSEC) have been sectoral dialogue partners since 2009 and last April signed a Memorandum of Understanding on the following topics:

- i. Transport, including maritime transport & accessibility;
- ii. Social & economic cohesion;
- iii. Environment & energy;
- iv. Tourism;
- v. Trade, economic development and SMEs;
- vi. Science and technology;
- vii. Information & communication technologies.

The CPMR BBSC and BSEC will continue to strengthen their cooperation through forthcoming events to be held in Istanbul on

- 31 October - 1 November 2017 “High-Level Conference on Black Sea Fisheries and Aquaculture”;
- 1<sup>st</sup> semester of 2018 (date tbc) “How to attract cruise tourism in the Black Sea?”

He reminded participants that the BBSC, with its Member Regions, is deeply involved and active in the main policy areas: maritime issues, European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP) and EU Strategy for the Adriatic and Ionian Region (EUSAIR).

The Commission continues its efforts in preparing project proposals in the above-mentioned areas in order to meet the priorities of its Members. Through involvement in concrete projects, it also aims to broaden its horizons and have an opening towards potential new Members.

The General Assembly ratified the BBSC Political Bureau Members and unanimously elected Ms Christiana Kalogirou, Regional Governor of North Aegean (GR) as the BBSC President for the 2017-2019 period.

In her election speech, President Kalogirou thanked the Members for her election and for their trust. She invited Members to look to the future in implementing the policy areas already mentioned and presented the [BBSC Business Plan](#) and its five strategic priorities consisting of:

- Promoting the interests of our area;
- Developing new projects;
- Becoming more active in the shaping of macro-regional strategies;
- Further enhancing our presence in the CPMR, and
- Increasing our membership.

**Mr Marian Dinulescu**, Vice-President of Calarasi County Council (RO) and 1<sup>st</sup> Vice-President of the BBSC, ([see presentation](#)) focused on cooperation in agriculture. Mr Dinulescu thanked the participants for all efforts undertaken for the smooth running of the CPMR and its Geographical Commissions, which contributed to the improvement of the Balkan and Black Sea policies.

He explained the agricultural situation of Calarasi, underlining that agriculture is the basic economic activity representing 83% of the total area. The County aims to attract as much European funds as possible, in order to stimulate economic and social development.

Mr Dinulescu called for cooperation between farming groups in the Black Sea Region by sharing best practices, experience and expertise, which develop cooperation and lead to the economic and social development of agriculture. Cooperating in inter-regional projects on agriculture and including Common Agricultural Policy among the key policies in the post-2020 programming period, are two main priorities for Vice-President Dinulescu. He thanked participants and asked them to support his candidacy for the BBSC Vice-Presidency.

**Mr Alexandru Dan Munteanu**, Councillor of Tulcea County Council (RO), [shared](#) with participants Tulcea's experience in European Neighbourhood Policy and European successful projects implemented by the County in field of culture, health, and environment. Mr Dan Munteanu informed participants about the bilateral Memoranda of Understanding between Tulcea County Council and Tavush Province (Armenia) and Izmail City (Ukraine) as a means of developing mutual cooperation in various fields with local authorities from Eastern Partnership countries.

Mr Dan Munteanu reminded participants that the reviewed European Neighbourhood Policy in 2015 recognised that the EU cannot alone follow a set of challenges in Eastern countries, but will play an important role in creating opportunities to develop positive relationships. He concluded by underlining that there is a need to emphasise the Schengen area, and that the multispeed Europe had caused a demobilized effect in the Regions.

Given the recent elections in Bulgaria that made it difficult for Bulgarian delegations to participate, **Mr Stavros Kalognomos** presented [the maritime priorities](#) for the next period and proposed that joint action in the area could focus on the areas of coastal and maritime tourism, fisheries and aquaculture, and the management and protection of maritime and coastal areas.

Regarding agricultural cooperation, Mr Kalognomos informed participants that collaboration between CPMR Members from all Geographical Commissions is highly encouraged and mentioned the example of Occitanie Region (France), which is looking for partners in the Black Sea area on youth mobility in the fields of agriculture, engineering, tourism, and maritime issues.

Regarding BBSC membership, Mr Kalognomos said that the BBSC maintains links with its Members in the Republic of Moldova and Ukraine, as well as with the Turkish Regional Development Agencies, and has planned several meetings with the Missions and Permanent Representations in Brussels of the BSEC Member States, in order to make the CPMR-BSEC MoU as efficient as possible.

The CPMR Secretary General, Ms Eleni Marianou, informed participants that she has been in contact with the Montenegrin delegation she met during the EUSAIR Forum in Ioannina, as they are very interested in the CPMR membership. However, as Montenegro does not have Regions, the idea is to get in touch with the Association of Local Authorities.

The BBSC President thanked all delegates for their active participation in this Annual General Assembly and reminded participants that the next BBSC meeting will be held within the framework of the 45<sup>th</sup> CPMR General Assembly, on 18-20 October 2017 in Helsinki.

Since the BBSC Annual General Assembly meeting, meetings with Georgian, Russian and Serbian representatives have been held.