



CPMR BALKAN & BLACK
SEA COMMISSION

Minutes

Pre-Annual General Assembly of the CPMR Balkan & Black Sea Commission

19 October 2017, Helsinki (Helsinki- Uusimaa, Finland)

Adopted during the General Assembly meeting on 31 May 2018, Burgas (Bulgaria)

Ms Christiana Kalogirou, Regional Governor of North Aegean (Greece) and BBSC President, welcomed the participants and presented the main steps taken since the BBSC General Assembly in Serres (Central Macedonia, Greece) towards enhancing the Commission's presence and work in the area.

The BBSC President represented the CPMR at the [2017 Black Sea Stakeholder Conference on Blue Economy](#), held in September 2017 in Batumi (Georgia), where she participated as a speaker at the opening session on "Sustainable blue growth: Leadership exchange". In the framework of this high-level conference, Ms Kalogirou had the opportunity to exchange with representatives of the European Commission, BSEC and Black Sea States on different possibilities for future collaboration. While in Batumi, President Kalogirou also met with the Chairman of Adjara Autonomous Republic Government, Ambassador Zurab Pataradze, and discussed the added value of the CPMR in the wider Black Sea region and possibilities for future collaboration with Adjara.

Furthermore, the BBSC President referred to the "[Investment Opportunities in the Balkans and Black Sea area](#)" conference, held last July in Brussels, where the representatives of the European Investment Bank (EIB), the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD) and the Black Sea Trade and Development Bank (BSTDB) presented the state of play of both public and private investments and the role of development banks active in the Balkans and Black Sea area, and explored the functioning of financial tools.

Lastly, President Kalogirou referred to establishing contacts with representatives at regional and State level from the wider Black Sea area, in an effort to better pave the way for collaboration opportunities. This is indeed of high interest to the BBSC. She invited all member Regions to be actively involved in the CPMR and BBSC actions and activities.

Mr Georgios Aspasidis, Regional Councillor in charge of Tourism, Regional Unit of Thessaloniki – [Region of Central Macedonia](#) (Greece), which was awarded European Entrepreneurial Region (EER) for 2018, focused on "*Supporting Entrepreneurship in the Balkan & Black Sea area*".

The Region of Central Macedonia, coordinator of the BBSC Working Group on Tourism, is a successful example of a regional authority with a high percentage of absorption of EU funds that have been used efficiently and quickly during the current period, reaching 92 per cent in different sectors.

In the field of tourism, ideas and projects using innovative technology help to attract a proper tourism mix in the prefecture areas comprising the Region of Central Macedonia. To this end, developing different types of tourism, such as religious and medical tourism, is expected to attract tourists from a wider area, including Eastern Europe.

To conclude, Mr Aspasidis reaffirmed that Central Macedonia remains open to partnerships and to sharing its experience with other CPMR member Regions.

Mr Patrick Anvroin, CPMR Director for Transport, presented the “[EU transport policy in the wider Black Sea area: expected opportunities for regional authorities during the Bulgarian and Romanian EU presidencies](#)” and informed participants of the [Transport and Accessibility session](#) (session 2) of the General Assembly.

He presented the 11 TEN-T Network priority corridors which concentrated about 95% of Connecting Europe Facility money for the current programming period. Those corridors have been managed with help of specific fora, where regional authorities are invited to participate. He therefore strongly urged participants to take part in this kind of fora, mainly regarding the East-Med and Rhine-Danube corridors that are of interest to the BBSC member Regions.

He underlined that there will be crucial discussions during the Bulgarian Presidency between the Directorates General of the European Commission on how the transport infrastructure will be financed in the future, and that the CPMR will take part in this debate with a specific Position Paper.

Furthermore, he recalled that the CPMR had already adopted positions in March and June 2017, during the CPMR Political Bureau meetings: [Review of the Connecting Europe Facility \(CEF\) Post-2020 principles advocated by the CPMR](#) and [TEN-T core network corridors: amendments proposed under the review of the CEF2](#). Moreover, a technical paper on the Motorways of the Sea (MoS), a theme of great importance for the CPMR, entitled “[Contribution to the review of their priorities and implementation](#)” was adopted.

He concluded by inviting participants to get involved and follow the CPMR General Secretariat’s work on MoS and corridors, and to join the [CPMR Transport Working Group](#) and participate in its meetings.

Mr Nicolas Brookes, CPMR Director in charge of Regional Policy, focused on “[EU Policies for Youth: perspectives from the CPMR](#)” and presented the CPMR’s views and work in the field of European Social Policy and in particular on the European Social Fund (ESF).

The social dimension of Europe has gained new ground over the past couple of years with the introduction of legislation that boosts activities of the European Commission (EC) in this field. There remains a high unemployment rate in Europe, particularly among young people. The European Commission has launched several recent initiatives to promote a social dimension of Europe to tackle this situation, including a reflection paper on the social dimension in Europe by 2025, published in 2017. The CPMR welcomes this initiative but regrets that the reflection paper does not refer to the role of the ESF, which the CPMR considers to be a key instrument for regions and the EU in tackling youth unemployment.

Mr Brookes referred to “[The European Social Fund 2014-2020 & the Youth Employment Initiative – the experience of CPMR Member Regions](#)” Study carried out by the CPMR, which collected views and experiences of CPMR Member Regions on the ESF and the implementation of the Youth Employment Initiative.

The contributions from 28 regions fed into the CPMR proposal for the [Policy Position on Cohesion Policy post-2020](#), adopted at the CPMR Political Bureau in June 2017.

The key messages of the CPMR study were positive in terms of assessment and instruments. The ESF has an essential territorial dimension as it is linked to regional competence. It is also linked to the smart specialisation strategies and guides the development of ESF regional programmes. More flexibility and simplicity have been asked for, which lead to efficiency and cost saving in terms of implementing the ESF. Some difficulties in the use of the youth unemployment initiative were reported. The majority of regions pointed out that youth issues remain a priority and should be high on the agenda of the post-2020 European Social Fund. The CPMR is concerned about the EC taking the ESF out of the Structural Funds. However, social issues and inclusion, skills and employment will surely be acknowledged as a priority.

Mr Damien Périssé, CPMR Director for Maritime Affairs, presented the [“Maritime priorities for the next period”](#), referred to the CPMR [“Maritime Agenda”](#) that summarises the CPMR’s activities in maritime affairs, and pointed out that more cooperation in the wider Black Sea is being sought.

Mr Périssé highlighted a number of CPMR activities and is keen to develop those actions with the regions from the wider Black Sea and the BBSC member regions.

Regarding **EU maritime strategy**, he recalled the adoption of the Blue Growth ministerial declaration of April 2017, the CPMR conference held in October 2017 and the legacy created by Brexit regarding the future of EU maritime policy. The CPMR expressed its opinion in the [Policy Position](#) published in March 2017 and by participating in relevant events.

Maritime spatial planning is also quite relevant to the Black Sea as there is a European directive that is being implemented. Mr Périssé reminded members that the CPMR was available for any discussion with regard to setting up different projects.

Plastics is the new topic on which the CPMR is keen to collaborate, as well as **oil spills**. He mentioned the example of Attica Region (Greece) to which the CPMR has given full support by indicating experts and claiming compensation for the territories near to Piraeus. He stated that unfortunately many regions had not been prepared for this kind of situation in the past.

Lastly, he mentioned that the CPMR is due to launch specific work on **marine energies and maritime industries** and is keen to develop proposals on maritime industries regarding state aid, shipyards etc. During the European Year of Cultural Heritage 2018 there will be many initiatives in the field of the **cultural tourism and ocean literacy**. He invited all interested Regions to contact the CPMR General Secretariat in order to contribute to this work.

Ms Lise Guennal, Project Officer at the CPMR, presented the CPMR’s activities on sustainable tourism [“Tourism: good practices and ideas for collaboration with CPMR Members from different sea basins”](#).

The CPMR’s actions involve general monitoring of the link between the maritime Regions and the European Strategy for Coastal and Maritime Tourism, participation in the Pan-European dialogue with cruise operators, and development of practical exchanges and collaborative projects at European level and in the sea basins.

The CPMR’s dedicated working group is now mainly focused on sustainable maritime and coastal tourism, as well as cultural tourism, as these represent strong leverage for regional economic development. Its action includes a sea basin dimension in connection with relevant working groups of the CPMR Geographical Commissions through an integrated approach. The Working Group focuses on three main objectives:

stimulating performance and competitiveness, improving knowledge and mainstreaming tourism. Its reflections are actively nourished by the Geographical Commissions' work and projects that also create synergies.

After the formal adoption by the members present of the draft minutes of the BBSC General Assembly held in Serres (Central Macedonia, Greece) on 24 May 2017, **Mr Stavros Kalognomos**, Policy Officer at the CPMR presented briefly the financial issues and then focused on [the state of play and the next steps](#) of the BBSC.

He explained that the BBSC is trying to boost its budget by participating in project proposals with a BBSC-focus, when eligible, and recalled that, as decided during the last General Assembly in Serres, the Commission is prospecting membership in all countries of the wider Black Sea area.

Regarding the policy work related to the European Commission and its Directorates-General for Maritime Affairs and Fisheries (DG MARE) and Research and Innovation (DG RTD), he informed the BBSC members that the CPMR will be fully associated to the Steering Group of the **Facility for Blue Growth in the Black Sea** and that it is taking part in the meetings for developing a **Blue Growth Initiative for Research and Innovation in the Black Sea**.

As regards the Directorate-General for European Neighbourhood Policy and Enlargement Negotiations (DG NEAR), the BBSC has been drafting a Concept Note for a Black Sea Regional and Local Authorities Forum focused on the latest developments of the Eastern Partnership.

He also highlighted the [Memorandum of Understanding](#) signed last April between the CPMR and the Organization of the Black Sea Economic Cooperation (BSEC) giving a new impetus to our long-standing collaboration.

In light of the possibilities and efforts presented so far by and within the BBSC, **President Kalogirou** invited regions to collaborate closely on the different topics covered by the CPMR to make their voice better heard, submit project proposals and seize the opportunity of the upcoming presidencies of the Council of the EU (i.e. the Bulgarian and the Romanian Presidencies during the first semesters of 2018 and 2019, respectively).

During the 2017 BBSC General Assembly in Serres, the members reaffirmed their interest in collaborating on **agriculture**, an important sector for the economy in the Balkan & Black Sea area. They therefore invited two CPMR member Regions with significant experience in the field to share their knowledge with the BBSC members.

Ms Sophie Cochard, Director, Pays de la Loire Region (France), explained the Region's main activities related to the farming and food industry – its biggest economic sector - and the networks in which it is involved. Pays de la Loire mainly targets EU initiatives, programmes and projects on research and innovation in the agriculture, agrifood, and bioeconomy sectors. There is a lot of essential information circulating to improve the capacity of regional actors to be involved efficiently in EU projects, and the Region can benefit from the vast network of potential partners.

The Smart Specialisation Platform for Agri-Food (S3P Agri-Food), supported by the European Commission, is a new platform in which Pays de la Loire Region is involved and works together with other CPMR members, e.g. Andalucía and Emilia Romagna, to develop interregional cooperation, multilevel governance for supporting clusters and the regional ecosystem to focus on smart specialisation strategies in priority areas for transforming emerging industries.

Ms Cochard concluded saying that Pays de la Loire would be honoured to work together with the BBSC members.

Mr Federico Sgarbi, Territorial Development Officer, Brittany Region (France), presented the Region's areas of interest, informing participants that Brittany Region is the main agricultural Region in France and Europe. He mentioned the example of competitiveness hubs to foster innovation. He stated Brittany's interest in a possible reform of the CAP (Common Agriculture Policy) and was keen to share views with the BBSC members on different topics regarding agriculture.

Mr George Alexakis, CPMR Vice-president in charge of maritime issues and Vice-Governor on European and International Affairs, Region of Crete, focused on several points.

He mentioned the lack of discussion on macroregional strategies within the Balkan and Black Sea area similar to the EU Strategy for the Adriatic and Ionian Region (EUSAIR) and the Westmed Maritime Initiative. These offer the opportunity to various stakeholders to learn from each other on how to cooperate and exchange good practices. This is a field open for action that the Regions should exploit with the upcoming EU Presidencies.

Furthermore, he mentioned a number of maritime issues that could be addressed by the BBSC, such as maritime transport flows, maritime spatial planning and coastal pollution.

President Kalogirou, thanked all the participants and speakers and closed the session.