2019 BBSC General Assembly

Opening Speeches

Mr Horia Teodorescu, CPMR Vice-President in charge of Neighbourhood Policy and President of Tulcea County Council (Romania), welcomed all participants and gave a welcoming speech. He started by mentioning the importance the understanding agreements, which Tulcea has signed with the two administration units from the Republic of Moldova and Ukraine, had in reaching one of the main objectives of the CPMR – to support the balanced development of cross-border regions. Mr Teodorescu stressed that the two main topics tackled in the meeting, blue growth and sustainable transport, had the purpose to consolidate or initiate, where needed, cooperation in the Balkan and Black Sea area.

Concerning blue development, Mr Teodorescu noted that it can be a factor of economic growth and provide food safety with a minimum impact on the environment and that the experience of the Greek Regions and partners will be more than useful for the members of the Black Sea basin. With regard to sustainable transport in the Balkan and Black Sea region, he ascertained that Tulcea is directly interested in improving the accessibility and connectivity of the whole county at national, regional, and cross-border level. Tulcea’s top priority is to build sustainable partnerships in the area, for which active support of the partner regions and especially the active support of the decision-makers is needed.

Romania is now seeing great opportunities, under the Presidency of the EU Council which started on 1 January 2019, in a period which is marked by great responsibility in defining the future of the European Union. Having this mandate, which is a first for Romania, represents an unseen challenge but also a great opportunity.

Mr Teodorescu concluded by addressing his friends from the Republic of Moldova and Ukraine, with whom he hopes to collaborate within the CPMR and its BBSC in the nearest future. He said that their interaction with the two entities so far has been successful and that he looks forward to future collaborations.

H.E. Sirma Caraman, Deputy Minister of Regional Development and Public Administration of Romania, welcomed everyone to her hometown and thanked Mr Teodorescu for his contribution to organising the event which marked a long-term cooperation between the Local and Regional Authorities.
Ms Caraman stated that Romania’s adherence to the EU has led to connecting the country’s public administration to the European Union’s mechanisms, while increasing democracy at regional and national levels. The competencies of the public administration have substantially increased, which helps provide better public services to the citizens and ensure an active and fair participation based on trust, responsibility, efficiency and transparency.

Ms Caraman expressed her delight regarding the fact that the event took place during the Romanian Presidency of the Council of the EU, the motto of which was “Cohesion, a common European value”, and which wanted to ensure European convergence and coherence. She underlined that the BBSC’s event was among those which are in favour of a better territorial cohesion and expressed her certitude that all the people present are dialogue partners for common interests and for common issues, and that the debates would bring added value.

H.E. Dumitru Daniel Botânoiu, Deputy Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development of Romania, thanked the participants and the organisers on behalf of the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development for the invitation and for the opportunity to be by their side in such an important moment. He also thanked Ms Străchinescu Olteanu, Head of Unit, because the European Commission’s DG MARE was always by the side of the ministry and of the region in general.

Mr Botânoiu mentioned the need to be specific in future EU policies, in order to be able to develop projects which would address local issues, such as maintaining activities in the area and avoiding emigration, but not without reaching environmental targets, as future generations deserve to enjoy the beauty and uniqueness of the Danube Delta as we do.

Ms Christiana Kalogirou, President of the CPMR Balkan and Black Sea Commission and Regional Governor of North Aegean (Greece), thanked Tulcea County Council for hosting the BBSC annual General Assembly and for the very warm reception. She expressed her delight to work with Mr Valentin Moldoveanu, BBSC Vice-President and Tulcea County Councillor, for the next 2 years and to represent the BBSC at the event.

Ms Kalogirou presented the CPMR as focusing on a wide range of activities, including blue growth, transport, development, climate change and tourism, and thereby the Member Regions receive a plethora of services that allow them to collaborate with a multitude of partners throughout Europe. She mentioned that the BBSC is always open to new members both from the Black Sea region and the Balkans, in order to make their voice better heard at European level.

Mrs Mirela Furtună, Deputy in the Parliament of Romania, welcomed the guests and expressed her delight to be present for the second time at a BBSC General Assembly.

Mrs Furtună mentioned that, in line with the main objectives of the EU, the Romanian Parliament helps to promote European citizens’ welfare in the framework of sustainable development, relying on a balanced economic growth and strengthening of economic, social and territorial cohesion.

Mrs Furtună recalled the fact that Romania is one of the most important countries in the EU when it comes to good transportation on inland waters. According to Eurostat, Romania provides almost 8,5% of inland water transport in the EU. However, she also mentioned that Romania’s transportation capacity could be significantly increased by taking more care of the Danube and providing the possibility of safer transportation. Mrs Furtună concluded by adding that increasing the capacity of the Constanța harbour and accepting Romania into the Schengen Area, would strongly facilitate the development of good transportation on inland waterways from Romania to the EU.

Mrs Magdalena Andreea Străchinescu Olteanu, Head of Unit 1. Maritime Innovation, Marine Knowledge and Investment, Dir A — Maritime Policy and Blue Economy, Directorate-General for Maritime Affairs and Fisheries (DG MARE) of the European Commission, introduced the European
Commission’s Communication “A Clean Planet for all”, underlining the attention that the ocean has gained lately, mostly in terms of climate, energy, sustainability, and food.

Mrs Strâncinescu Olteanu announced that recently the Commission, the Parliament and the Council have agreed on the main priorities for the next Horizon Europe (2021-2027), with one of the most important cross-cutting priorities being called “Healthy Oceans, Seas, Coastal and Inland Waters”.

Mrs Strâncinescu Olteanu told the participants how important it is to get involved and consider the whole landscape of opportunities (Structural Funds, EMFF, Horizon, but also DG Calls) and reminded them of the adoption of the “Strategic Research and Innovation Agenda for the Black Sea” and the “Common Maritime Agenda for the Black Sea”, in May 2019, in Bucharest.

Mr Andrei Chivu, Head of Unit “Projects Monitoring”, Ministry of European Funds of Romania, updated participants on the situation regarding investments made by the Management Unit for Operational Funds in Tulcea and Constanța counties, namely 24 projects in preparation in both counties and 25 projects under implementation, with a total value of 3,8 billion euros.

Workshop on Blue Growth as a driver for cooperation in the Black Sea and the Danube and the experience of other sea basins

Mrs Strâncinescu Olteanu presented a short overview of what the European Commission is doing in terms of blue economy and what opportunities exist around the Black Sea, what instruments there are, and what the EU wants to achieve in the future.

One of the most important factors of the global blue economy is aquaculture, which is growing fast, and which includes not only fish, but also algae. Algae could be used in a wide range of industries including food, energy, medicines, cosmetics, plastic replacement etc. Another very important factor is offshore wind – Europe has the biggest offshore wind capacity in the world. The North Sea is doing the best in this regard, but there is still much to be done in other sea basins. As the digitalisation trend is rocketing, by 2050 the demand for energy will be 4 times higher than it is today.

The Black Sea is doing quite badly in terms of renewable energy and, therefore, Mrs Strâncinescu Olteanu fully encouraged participants to apply for projects in this area. Among the main funding instruments will be the new Horizon 2021-2027 and a newly developed platform, that will be launched soon, which will encompass both the EMFF and the EIF (European Investment Fund).

Finally, Mrs Strâncinescu Olteanu pointed out that the European Commission recently put education and training quite high on its agenda. The European Commission is prone to support education not only at academic level, but also vocational training and skills and collaboration between business and education, as nowadays many universities develop their curricula without having consulted the industries and the market. Erasmus+ is the main contributor to skill-building in this regard.

Dr Gheorghe Viorel Ungureanu, Senior Researcher at the Romanian National Institute for Research and Development on Marine Geology and Geo-ecology (GeoEcoMar), presented two important research initiatives in the area: DANUBIUS-RI and the Strategic Research and Innovation Agenda for the Black Sea (Black Sea SRIA).

DANUBIUS-RI is a pan-European research infrastructure in the Danube region, which supports interdisciplinary research in river-sea systems because usually fresh water scientific communities and marine water scientific communities work separately. DANUBIUS-RI brings together these two communities to identify, discuss and solve scientific problems in the transitional areas: delta estuaries, lagoons, all types of transitions between river and sea. The project, being currently in its preparatory
phase, is coordinated by Romania and has been designated as a flagship project of the EU Strategy for the Danube (EUSDR).

Regarding the Black Sea SRIA, it is the strategic framework for Research and Innovation to support blue growth in the Black Sea area. It is the result of coordinated efforts by the Directorate-General for Research and Innovation (DG RTD) Unit for Marine Research, with the participation of DG MARE and the European Union’s External Action Service (EEAS).

The Black Sea SRIA is based on 4 pillars: The Black Sea knowledge bridge; Black Sea blue economy; building support systems and innovative infrastructures; and citizens’ involvement.

Associate Professor Dr Taner Albayrak, Faculty of Economics and Administrative Sciences, Department of Maritime Business Management at Piri Reis University in Turkey, after thanking Mr Stavros Kalognomos, the CPMR, and Tulcea County Council, briefly introduced the Piri Reis University.

Dr Albayrak started his presentation by mentioning how important the ocean is both for the planet’s inhabitants and for economic development. He also noted that the rapid world population growth, technologic development, and increased consumer demand, the need for food, energy, and that trade is growing. This does not mean anything else other than the ocean must be better used, in a coordinated and innovative way.

The increasing rate of activity in the marine environment creates a lot of conflicts both between the users and between the users and the environment (e.g. offshore windmills built in inadequate ways can hinder the activity of diverse vessels). This problem will require coordinate solutions not only within countries but also between countries.

If we look at the Black Sea, it is an economic area with potential for growth, an important transport and energy hub, with many coastal countries benefiting from tourism, and an important space for practicing fishing and aquaculture. However, chemical pollution, which is the most serious transboundary problem, biodiversity and costal degradation, as well as solid waste, are problems that call for innovative approaches, good planning and cooperation.

So how can this be achieved? The most important thing is to raise awareness among all users, which can be done by developing educational programmes for raising awareness on emerging maritime issues and environmental challenges in the Black Sea. We should also develop common knowledge, like improving common expertise and capabilities in all the marine-related management, sciences, technology and engineering.

Dr Albayrak concluded by mentioning several projects in which the Piri Reis University is involved in order to overcome the previously mentioned issues as well as the ‘Maritime Innovative Network of Education for Emerging Maritime Issues’ (MINE-EMI) Project in which the CPMR is involved as a partner.

Dr Gregory Yovanof, Managing Director at Strategis Maritime Center of Excellence, Strategis – Maritime ICT Cluster, presented the cluster’s activities in the field of digitalisation, but not before introducing the global shipping trends and the role of digital innovation hubs in the blue economy.

The blue economy in the EU has a total turnover of 566 billion euros per year and creates jobs for nearly 3,5 million people. The EU invests a lot in the development of new technologies that would accelerate the growth in the blue economy (robotics, autonomous systems, renewable energy, underwater currents, algae, new types of innovation networks and so on). Still, a big part of the blue economy is represented by traditional shipping and sea transportation and also, shipping is probably the most important industry in the world. However, shipping is changing. Recently, the Boston Consulting Group (BSG) warned the industry to digitalise or die, as simply as that.
The new technologies are strongly transforming the infrastructure. We are seeing the transformation of ports into smart ports, which means doubling the capacities of the ports without doubling their physical space. The same thing is happening with ships. They are being connected through a complex network which allows them to assess the situation in the surrounding area and respond accordingly to diverse situations, without human intervention. All this offers opportunities for new strategic partnerships, even between not so common partners, like for instance the one between IBM and Maersk for advancing global shipping. However, it’s not only corporations who change their industry to adjust to the new era. Likewise, the regions also strive to remain competitive in the era of digital shipping, so we are witnessing a global race of the local authorities to become the most attractive locations for knowledge-intensive industries.

Dr Yovanof continued by presenting the Strategis Maritime ICT Cluster, which was founded in order to overcome Greece’s shortages in terms of maritime technologies. Its mission is to offer up-to-date maritime services and synergies for blue growth. Through its network of member companies, Strategis conducts Research and Development in digital shipping, offers strategic consulting, education, vocational training, incubators and management for entrepreneurship in the new economy.

Last but not least, Dr Yovanof has shared some critical success factors which can contribute to forging a good networking innovation initiative.

Mr Eleftherios Sdoukopoulos, Associate Researcher at the Hellenic Institute of Transport (HIT) of the Centre for Research and Technology Hellas (CERTH) in Greece, presented the ‘Maritime Alliance for Fostering the European Blue Economy through a Marine Technology Skilling Strategy’ (MATES) project.

Almost 40% of European employers say that they cannot find people with the right skills in order to grow and innovate. Therefore, the project’s focus is on skills, which in today’s fast changing global economy are increasingly determining competitiveness and drive innovation. Skills serve as a pool factor for investments, they are the main catalyst for growth, and they are also key to social cohesion.

Representing a consortium of 17 partners located in 8 European countries, MATES is the project that got selected in order to address the maritime technology sector with the objective to improve skills intelligence and tackle the skills shortages problem.

The project started last year and will be concluded in December 2021 with an overall budget of 4,9 million euros, funded by the Erasmus+ programme. It specifically targets some key sectors like: ship building; offshore renewable energy, including offshore wind; solar and ocean energy.

The project has a triple helix approach, having services on one side, the industry actors on the other, and education and training providers on the third side. In the middle stands the analysis of gaps in skills and the formation of a strategy and a long-term action plan for addressing these gaps. The strategy draft is already being reviewed by experts and external stakeholders and is expected to be validated at an open workshop on 28 May in Brussels.

Mr Daniel Buhai, President of the RO-PESCADOR Association and Member of the Executive Committee of Black Sea Advisory Council (BISAC), presented the association RO-PESCADOR, which has been recognised by the European Commission as the representative association of producers from the marine fishing and processing sectors.

The association’s goals are to add value to the Danube and Black Sea sustainable fisheries through superior quality products with competitive perspectives on the international market; to identify new sustainable aquatic resources as well as new fishing methodologies with less impact on the environment; and to promote its members’ activities and through this, to promote the whole region, increasing also its touristic potential.
Mr Buhai has also presented some of RO-PESCADOR’s issues, first of all in terms of lacking a comprehensive bilateral maritime dialogue with Bulgaria regarding the harmonisation of fishing legislation. And secondly, he mentioned that the creation of a connection of their emerging fish stock with those of other EU countries, such as Greece and Bulgaria, would also be very helpful.

**Mr Dan Verbina**, President of the Danube Delta Fish Producers Federation of Romania, explained the historical perspective of the Danube Delta Biosphere Reserve.

After stating that fishing in the Danube Delta is the oldest occupation of the local population and represents one of its main economic activities, Mr Verbina in his presentation informed the participants about the problems faced daily by fishermen, including: the warping of lakes and channels; the excessive spread of subversive vegetation and eutrophication; the excessive breeding of harmful bird species; the reduction of fish natural reproduction zones; and the disruption of their migration routes. To overcome these problems, the federation has initiated several projects on topics like: reconstruction of fish natural reproduction zones, promotion of selective tools in the Danube and Black Sea coastal fishing, and experience and good practices exchanges with other EU Member States.

Also, Mr Verbina called for the CPMR, as it has the declared objective to create bridges with diverse European programmes and strategies meant to facilitate a balanced development of the regions, to offer its support regarding the next Calls for EU funding in maritime affairs and fisheries.

**Mr Valentin Moldoveanu**, BBSC Vice-President and Tulcea County Councillor, thanked Mr Verbina and stated from his position as the newly elected Vice-President of the BBSC that he will do his best in order to obtain a special status for the Danube Delta and Tulcea County.

**Ms Natalia Budescu**, Director of Association of Cross-border Cooperation “Lower Danube Euroregion”, presented the Black Sea NGO Forum, an initiative started by the Romanian Ministry for Foreign Affairs in partnership with the European Commission in the framework of the Black Sea Synergy. The Forum aims at increasing the level of dialogue and cooperation among NGOs in the wider Black Sea Region, strengthening the NGOs capacity to influence regional and national policies and to increase the number and quality of regional partnerships and projects.

**Mr Stavros Kalognomos**, CPMR Balkan and Black Sea Commission Executive Secretary, presented the Blue Biotechnology Master for a Blue Career (**BBMBC**) Project.

The BBMBC Project’s objectives were to create an innovative Master’s degree that allows students to swiftly enter the labour market once they have graduated, and to capitalise on this flagship project by developing similar Master’s degrees in partner universities or anywhere else in Europe. *(For more information please consult this [link](#) – p. 27)*.

**Workshop on sustainable transport in the Balkan and Black Sea region**

**Ms Oana (Andronescu) Cristea**, Head of Unit, Managing Authority for Romania-Serbia IPA CBC Programme, Directorate for European Territorial Programmes, Ministry of Regional Development and Public Administration of Romania, introduced her presentation by telling the participants that the dossier dealing with the Western Balkans and Turkey has reached a general partial agreement in the Council of the European Union and that she is very proud of this result.

Concerning the European Territorial Cooperation Programmes in Romania, the Ministry which Ms Andronescu Cristea represents acts as Managing Authority in 6 programmes: RO-BG; RO-RS; RO-HU; RO-UA; RO-MD and the ENI CBC Black Sea Basin Programme, the main scope of which is to identify solutions that could be put together in order to tackle common challenges. Ms Cristea mentioned that transport
was the issue tackled in most of the programmes, even though the programmes in general deal with accessibility, transport, tourism, and environment.

Finally, Ms Cristea presented some results achieved through the EUSDR programmes, to which a lot of effort and money have been dedicated. Besides the common problems the riverside communities face, like flooding, they have also created some cooperation areas such as common fish markets. Most of the funded projects in the Danube region deal with flooding and emergency situations, which have been the biggest problems in the last couple of years.

Mr Andrey Abramchenko, Mayor of Izmail, Odesa Region (Ukraine), thanked Mr Teodorescu for the opportunity to participate in the event and to present the potential of Izmail as a fundament for cooperation between the city of Izmail and the County of Tulcea.

After presenting his city, Mr Abramchenko said that in the current year Izmail is ready to launch its collaboration with the Romanian partners and work together on the RO-UA CBC project for the development of an intermodal connection between Isaccea, Tulcea (Romania), Orlivka and Izmail (Ukraine). The implementation period of the project is 24 months and the allocated budget is 2.297.548 Euros. The applicant of the project is Izmail Municipality and Tulcea County Council is among the partners. Besides improving the mobility facilities for the local population and for local businesses, the project also aims at creating a more tourist-friendly environment in both Izmail and Tulcea.

Mr Abramchenko was happy to announce that, considering the pace at which the bilateral relations between Izmail and Tulcea evolve, he is positive that the project will be successfully implemented and that a long-standing partnership and friendly relations will be built.

Mr Lucian-Eduard Simion, Deputy in the Parliament of Romania, mentioned several geographical characteristics that limit the growth of the Danube Delta region, constraints which in his opinion should be an additional reason for the CPMR to build partnerships in the area, including those between Member States.

The development of sustainable transportation in the region represents a strategic objective, but also a need. It takes place both by sea and river and making it sustainable represents the most efficient method of both protecting the environment and decreasing the goods transportation costs at the same time. At this moment, the Danube river is highly under-used, with the volume of transported goods being 80% lower than the Rhine, for example. Thus, it is absolutely necessary to develop better intermodality, better connection with the other river basins, as well as to modernise and extend the infrastructure, transportation nodes, and inland harbours.

Mr Simion concluded by stressing that in order to achieve the proposed goals, we need to have clear objectives, proper equipment, and, of course, adequately trained staff. He expressed his certainty that those wetlands belonging to regions that are now CPMR Members have the warranty that their issues will be assessed and the solutions for their problems will be found.

Professor Dr Cornel Panait, Rector at the Maritime University of Constanța, Member of the Black Sea Universities Network (BSUN), started by presenting his University which, together with the naval academy, are delivering a consistent number of absolvents to the global fleet which are being appreciated by employers worldwide.

Dr Panait confessed that, unfortunately, Romania lacks maritime infrastructure, with the only usable interior water stream being the Danube channel. Currently, the main problem of this channel is that the water is too shallow, and many shipowners are obliged to wait sometimes for weeks until the water level rises and becomes navigable. He also mentioned the lack of container terminals both on the river and alongside the railways, which is a huge issue. Apart from that, the connection between Constanța and București is very poorly managed and has a severe lack of infrastructure.
Dr Panait believes that maritime transport safety is one of the main issues in the field and that this sector requires highly trained professionals. For this reason, the Maritime University of Constanța has established a special department and a Master’s programme in Maritime Cyber Security. He expressed his gratitude towards the EU’s Erasmus+ Programme and said that the time spent abroad by the students of the maritime field should be increased from 4 months to 1 year.

**Dr Vasile Pipirigeanu**, Coordinator of the Green Danube Project, co-funded by the Danube Transnational Programme (DTP) of the European Union, Romanian Maritime Training Centre (CERONAV), presented CERONAV and underlined that for the last 20 years it has eagerly focused on European funds, participating in more than 17 projects and being the lead organisation in 7 of them.

Dr Pipirigeanu continued by presenting the Green Danube project, which addresses the problem of sea transport pollution. It was submitted within the Danube Transnational Programme, a financial instrument of EUSDR, under axis number 3: environmentally friendly transportation. The project duration is 30 months, with 3 more months to go until its full implementation, and Mr Pipirigeanu invited the participants to their Final Conference in the region on 22-23 May.

The 3 specific objectives of the project are: to contribute to the limitation of the inland waterway transport pollution; to propose new transportation technologies; and to raise the public awareness regarding the environmental issues.

**Mr StavrosKalognomos**, CPMR Balkan and Black Sea Commission Executive Secretary, in his presentation regarding the CIVITAS DESTINATIONS Project, explained the project measures and the replication potential for the BBSC Member Regions.

The CIVITAS DESTINATIONS Project has been funded by the Horizon 2020 programme to develop and deliver more than 80 innovative sustainable mobility measures in order to improve the quality of life of citizens and tourists alike in 6 European island tourist destinations.

The CPMR is the partner responsible for the communication and dissemination activities of the project, as well as the operation of the Platform of Followers. The main purpose of the Platform of Followers is to entice Regions and cities to take up and replicate sustainable mobility and green tourism measures and actions that are developed by the project.