Minutes
2021 Balkan and Black Sea Commission Annual General Assembly
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Statutory Session

Mr Valentin MOLDOVEANU, Acting President of the CPMR Balkan and Black Sea Commission (BBSC), Tulcea County Councillor, welcomed the participants. He highlighted two major achievements during his mandate:
- The contribution to the new Horizon Europe Programme thanks to the BBSC participation in the Mission Board for Healthy Oceans, Seas, Coastal and Inland Waters of the European Commission;
- The appointment of a Vice-Chair responsible for the Danube and the Black Sea in the Seas, Rivers, Islands and Coastal Areas (SEArica) Intergroup of the European Parliament.

Despite difficulties the BBSC has been facing for several years, the Acting President expressed his satisfaction with the hard work the Commission kept carrying out regarding participation in various high-level events where it took advantage to raise its priorities, participation in a wide range of policies and in different EU projects that have enabled the better implementation of the BBSC Action Plan but also the development of its membership. It is obvious that the BBSC voice became better heard both at regional and European level. He underlined how the importance of working together in unity for the interests of BBSC Regions and its citizens. He is honoured that his Acting Presidency has paved the way for Mr Teodorescu, President of Tulcea County Council as future President of the Commission. He will continue to be involved and support the future work of the Commission and its new President for an even more productive Commission.

Mr Stavros KALOGNOMOS, Executive Secretary of the CPMR Balkan and Black Sea Commission presented the Activity Report 2019-2021. A Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) was signed respectively in 2017 with BSEC (Organisation of the Black Sea Economic Cooperation) and in 2021 with BSAMI (Black Sea Association of Maritime Institutions). Those MoU are in alignment with the BBSC Action Plan and the CPMR and BBSC’s priorities focusing on the maritime transport, coastal tourism, social affairs, cohesion policy etc....

In 2019, a Cooperation Agreement was signed with the ICBSS (International Centre for Black Sea Studies).
The CPMR has also started a cooperation with the promising Network of Think Tanks on the Eastern Partnership, which aims to engage leading think tanks, policy experts, and policy-makers from the 27 EU Member States and the six Eastern partners and beyond in an on-going inclusive, coordinated, and systematic dialogue on the EU’s post-2020 Eastern Policy. The network will support structured dialogue among stakeholders with an interest in the development of EU policy in relation to the Eastern Partnership.

Regarding maritime affairs, the CPMR is among the main actors mentioned in the Black Sea SRIA document to be involved in the implementation of the planned actions following the endorsement in 2019 of the Common Maritime Agenda for the Black Sea, a voluntary, bottom-up regional cooperation framework on maritime affairs and blue economy, driven and owned by the 7 countries involved: Bulgaria, Georgia, Republic of Moldova, Romania, Russia, Turkey, and Ukraine, under the Romanian EU Presidency. The CPMR BBSC is fully involved in the Steering Group.

In addition, Mr Moldoveanu is a Member and BBSC Representative in the Mission Board for Healthy Oceans, Seas, Coastal and Inland Waters, which aim is to raise awareness among citizens of the importance of healthy oceans, seas, coastal and inland waters and helps to develop solutions. This Mission identifies specific missions for implementation under the Horizon Europe programme that are in line with the CPMR and BBSC priorities and could participate in the calls for EU projects. Here the different partnerships could be encouraged.

The BBSC obtained the nomination of one Vice-Chair in charge of the Danube and the Black Sea in the Seas, Rivers, Islands and Coastal Areas Intergroup (SEArca) of the European Parliament, one of the most active European Parliament groups. Two Black Sea focused events have already been organised:

- **Fisheries and Aquaculture in the Danube and the Black Sea: views for building forward better**, 22 April 2021
- **SEArca Conference on the Black Sea: How can regional frameworks foster sustainable blue growth in the Black Sea basin?** 3 December 2020

The next event on “Marine Litter in the Danube and Black Sea” will be organised on 4th November 2021.

The CPMR, together with the BBSC, held a successful workshop during the European Maritime Day 2021 on “Sustainable Coastal Tourism: Key Actions Towards a Smart and Resilient Recovery”. The BBSC was represented by Mr Mamuka Berdzenishvili, Executive Director, Tourism Institute of Georgia (based in Batumi, Ajara Region). In addition, the CPMR BBSC participates in the Supporting Youth Entrepreneurship in Cultural Tourism for coastal communities in the Black Sea Region (CulTourE4Youth) project. The results will be consolidated in a dedicated workshop organised by the CPMR BBSC in Batumi (Ajara Region, Georgia) in January 2022.

Regarding accessibility and transport, the BBSC was also actively involved in various events held in 2020 and 2021 on the themes of accessibility, connectivity and digitalisation, sustainability planning, ports etc...that the Commission co-organised with its partners, the International Centre for Black Sea Studies (ICBSS) and the Hellenic Institute of Transport of the Centre for Research and Technology Hellas (HIT CERTH).

In addition, the CPMR, represented by the BBSC Executive Secretary, participated in the Meeting of the Ministers of Transport of the Organisation of the Black Sea Economic Cooperation (BSEC) that was held online in November 2020, under the Romanian BSEC Chairmanship-in-Office.
Those events have demonstrated clearly that regional cooperation appears crucial in coping with current challenges and the importance to connect EU and the non-EU regions.

Furthermore, the BBSC participated and supported the online workshop on the role of the railway in growth in the framework of the European Year of Rail, organised by a very active Member Region, Wester Greece.

Regarding the Adriatic Ionian Macro-Regional Strategy, the CPMR has participated as Coordinator of the Adriatic Ionian Network of Universities, Regions, Chambers of Commerce and Cities (AI-NURECC) Initiative in a video conference on Smart Specialisation Strategies last September 2020 in the framework of the Slovenian EUSAIR Presidency. During this important meeting, during which cross-cutting collaboration and mutual learning were promoted, the CPMR had the opportunity to introduce the Cultural and Creative Regional Ecosystems (CCRE-S3) thematic area elaborated by Aragon, Tuscany and Western Greece. The CCRE-S3 is the first thematic area under the Industrial Modernisation Platform with a specific focus on a macro-region, and in particular the EU Strategy for the Adriatic and Ionian Region (EUSAIR) from both regional and macro-regional perspectives. In this regard, the CPMR will ensure that particular focus will be given to the EUSAIR and the discussion open to the nine countries that are part of the EUSAIR, keeping at the same time the partnership open to participating regions from all over Europe. The Region of Western Greece is the CCRE-S3 leading region in charge of the coordination of the Adriatic-Ionian, Balkan and wider Black Sea region.

Particular attention is given to the follow-up of the Horizon Europe Calls for proposals that have been launched and to exploring different opportunities of cooperation.

During the 5th Forum of the EU Strategy for the Adriatic and Ionian Region (EUSAIR) under Serbian Presidency, the CPMR called for programmes to follow the EUSAIR needs, bridge the region, and fulfil this role so that neighbours in both the Adriatic-Ionian Region and the Western Balkans can work together. In this respect, the CPMR has recently renewed its Adriatic-Ionian Task Force, composed of representatives and experts from CPMR Member Regions in the Adriatic-ionian area, and co-chaired by the Regions of Ionian Islands, Ms Rodi KRATSA, Regional Governor of the Ionian Islands (Greece), and Marche, Mr Francesco ACQUAROLI, President of the Marche (Italy). The Task Force will be working on the CPMR areas of activity that are important for the Adriatic-Ionian Region, with the aim to offer a dedicated platform to boost exchanges and reflection within the CPMR Members in the area. To this extent, the synergy will be created with the recently renewed “Friends of EUSAIR” Interest Group of the European Parliament, under the leadership of MEP Maria Spyraki, with a view to promote specific messages before relevant decision-makers and stakeholders.

Regarding the developments in the field of the Black Sea Synergy, the CPMR BBSC was very active in several conferences where it had the chance to bring its contribution to the Policy Paper on the future of the Black Sea Synergy in the short and medium-term alongside experts from the ICBSS, Southern Federal University (SFedU, Russia), Center of Analysis of International Relations (AIR Center, Azerbaijan), the Hellenic Institute of Transport of the Centre for Research & Technology Hellas (HIT/CERTH, Greece) and also from the EU Institutions.

In addition to its activities, the BBSC allocates a significant percentage to the EU cooperation projects:

→ The Adriatic-Ionian Network of Universities, Regions, Chambers of Commerce and Cities Initiative PLUS (AI-NURECC PLUS) that is coordinated by the CPMR and funded by DG REGIO;

→ Maritime Innovative Network of Education for Emerging Maritime Issues (MINE-EMI) Erasmus+ Project, in which the CPMR is committed in communication activities. The next multiplier event is planned to take place on 11-12 November in Piraeus (Greece). The information will be communicated to Members in due course;
Innovative SOft SkilLs to Maritime Education and Training (iSOL-MET) Erasmus+ Project;
Supporting Youth Entrepreneurship in Cultural Tourism for coastal communities in the Black Sea Region (CulTourE4Youth);
A specific workshop is expected to be organised by the CPMR in January 2022 in Batumi (Ajara Region, Georgia);
Advancing Black Sea Research and Innovation to co-Develop Blue Growth within Resilient Ecosystems (BRIDGE-BS);
Calarasi County Council’s participation in CPMR IMC SolaQua Project (Horizon 2020).

The meeting was followed by the adoption of the draft Minutes of the Plenary online meeting held on 27 October 2020 and the ratification of the BBSC Political Bureau Members. We are waiting for the nomination of the Full Member and Alternate Member for Georgia. Albania was also invited to communicate the name of the representatives for the BBSC Political Bureau.

Mr Horia TEODORESCU, President of Tulcea County Council was elected President of the Commission for the 2021-2023 period. The First Vice-President of the BBSC will be Dr Konstantinos KAPODISTRIAS, Deputy Regional Governor of the Ionian Islands.

Mr Dumitru MERGEANI, County Manager at Tulcea County Council, shared some words on behalf of the newly-elected BBSC President, unfortunately absent for health reasons. The President thanked the Members for their trust and will be fully committed to continue to fulfil the mission for the benefit of the BBSC and its Members.

Efforts should be combined in the establishment and implementation of new and valuable programmes and initiatives for beneficial territorial impact both in cross-border cooperation and regional partnerships. Considering the current situation in Europe, he will take all necessary steps in order to make the most of the new EU instruments and EU policies linked to the Green Deal for the benefit of Balkan and Black Sea Region key economic sectors to face the challenges due to the Covid-19 pandemic. As a key action for the mandate, he will put in place different types of actions, policy messages, lobbying activities, organisation of high-level political conferences, and seminar sessions with Member Regions and key partners in the area: BSEC, ICBSS, BSAMI.

Cooperation will be explored with non-member regions belonging to the area as mentioned in the BBC Rules of Procedure and the work initiated within the cooperation projects in which the Commission is involved will be capitalised on. He acknowledged the need to work as an ambassador to approach non-member regions and spread the good work. He stressed the necessity to join forces to better know our voice at regional and EU level. Regular organisation of political meeting, technical meetings with staff, or ad-hoc invitations for Working Group meetings, could be a tool to use in this respect.

Mr Stavros Kalognomos presented the financial situation of the BBSC and underlined that the Commission, thanks to EU cooperation projects, is no longer in financial deficit and covers the salary costs of two people working in the Secretariat. He kindly reminded the members of the importance to keep their membership fees up to date and try to avoid delays that may affect the planning of activities.

He continued with the presentation of the political priorities for the next period and the update of the Action Plan.
The Commission will tend to make the most of new EU instruments and EU policies linked with the Green Deal. Almost all EU priorities of interest to the regional authorities are linked to the Green Deal and support the development and implementation of EU strategies and initiatives in the BBSC region:

- EUSAIR;
- Western Balkans;
- EU Black Sea Synergy initiative;
- Eastern Partnership;
- Common Maritime Agenda and Strategic Research and Innovation Agenda for the Black Sea.

As the Common Maritime Agenda for the Black Sea in 2022 will be coordinated by Georgia, the CPMR BBSC and Atlantic Arc Commission are planning to organise an AspBan project focusing on the Black Sea. The BBSC Secretariat will coordinate with the Georgian Member Regions.

- EUSDR and possible Macro-Regional strategy for the Carpathian Region.

It will be very important to enhance visibility, membership and increase partnerships.

The BBSC Executive Secretary addressed the sectoral approach and the portfolios that need to be aligned to the CPMR priorities. The portfolios are:

- **Maritime Affairs, including Transport and Skills** to be led by the BBSC President, Horia Teodorescu, President of the County Council Tulcea;
- Energy and Climate, to be decided;
- **Cultural and Creative Regional Ecosystems**: Deputy Governor Fokion Zaimis, Region of Western Greece, who expressed his high interest in this thematic area in order to promote the culture and heritage thematic area, to reinforce every relevant sector and call for cooperation opportunities with other regions in order to develop synergies and share best practice;
- Tourism, to be decided;
- Western Balkans, to be decided;
- **Eastern Neighbourhood**: Chairman Tornike Rijvadze, Ajara Region, is the CPMR Vice President responsible for Neighbourhood Policy.

Ms Georgia CHANTZI, Research and Policy Development Manager, International Centre for Black Sea Studies (ICBSS) (CPMR’s Cooperation Agreement partner) presented the BRIDGE-BS and CulTourE4Youth projects’ objectives (see the presentation).

Mr Fokion ZAIMIS, highlighted the opportunities in several sectors including the business, tourism, and cultural sectors. He added that the Members need to go further to involve more members from regions, State authorities, private Chambers of Commerce, especially industry chambers. He underlined the importance of setting milestones and working to achieve them. He provided information on the proposal for an underwater sea park, and he invited any interested regions to contact him with a view to forming a joint proposal. He asked Mr Kalognomos to coordinate this and investigate who is interested in order to create alliances.

On behalf of the BBSC President, Mr MERGEANI, thanked participants for the cooperation that has already brought results and paved the way for promising steps in the future. He expressed his wish to continue working closely with the Vice-Presidents and all members for the update and implementation of the Action Plan. It is very important to coordinate Members’ efforts and to focus both on policies and projects, and at the same time be open to our counterparts from the Balkan and Black Sea Region who want to join us and work together with us and the other CPMR Member Regions from across Europe.
He thanked Mr Moldoveanu for his two-year mandate as Active President of the BBSC. He hopes that the situation will improve and that we will meet soon in person at the upcoming CPMR meetings.

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. One of these Commissions is the Balkan and Black Sea Commission.

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