MINUTES
BBSC Plenary Session
16 November 2023, Saint-Malo (Brittany, France)

Approved by the 2024 BBSC Annual General Assembly
21 May 2024 | online via Teams

Stavros KALOGNOMOS, BBSC Executive Secretary
stavros.kalognomos@crpm.org

Mr Stavros KALOGNOMOS, Executive Secretary of the CPMR Balkan & Black Sea Commission (BBSC) welcomed the participants and presented the agenda of the meeting.

Mr Valentin MOLDOVEANU, County Councillor of Tulcea County Council (Romania), delivered a speech on behalf of the President of Tulcea County Council and BBSC President, Mr Horia Teodorescu. He expressed gratitude to the Brittany Region for hosting the meeting and congratulated the CPMR on its 50th Anniversary. Mr Moldoveanu highlighted the European Commission’s adoption of the Enlargement Package, emphasising the progress of countries like Georgia, Republic of Moldova, Ukraine, Albania, and others towards EU accession. In particular, he welcomed Georgia’s candidate country status recommendation, as well as the opening of accession negotiations with the Republic of Moldova and Ukraine, along with the new Growth Plan for the Western Balkans.

Solidarity with Ukraine, particularly within the ongoing war, was reaffirmed, with a commitment to support reconstruction efforts and refugees. The speech emphasized regional cooperation, including involvement in EU strategies for the Adriatic-Ionian, Danube, and Black Sea regions, as well as plans to participate in major events, such as the Black Sea Stakeholder Conference, to boost regional cooperation and innovation.

There was a call for contributions to update the BBSC Action Plan, focusing on specific sectors. Efforts to re-engage old members and welcome new ones were stressed. The speech also expressed gratitude to the CPMR and BBSC Secretariats for their support and highlighted the importance of renewing the SEArica Intergroup after the 2024 European elections.

Proposals for the 20th Anniversary celebration of regional cooperation were mentioned, along with the invitation for Emilia-Romagna Region to join the BBSC and for closer coordination among members. Bilateral meetings with Romanian regions and Moldovan local authorities were planned with the aim to expand the membership.

The importance of CPMR BBSC membership in the Eastern Partnership Civil Society Forum was emphasized, particularly in the framework of a deeper cooperation for the benefit of our Georgian members. Finally, Mr Moldoveanu encouraged coordinated efforts with the support of the CPMR to implement the joint Action Plan and benefit from networking opportunities.
Mr Stavros KALOGNOMOS reminded the need of updating the list of the Political Bureau following the regional elections in Greece. Mr Fokion ZAIMIS, Deputy Governor of Entrepreneurship, Research and Innovation, Region of Western Greece (Greece) and alternate representative of the BBSC President to the Political Bureau of the CPMR, will take up the position as 1st Vice-President of the BBSC until next spring.

Mr Georgios MITRAKOS, Director General of the International Centre for Black Sea Studies (ICBSS) discussed the challenges and cooperation possibilities within the broader Black Sea region. He underscored the extensive collaboration between both organisations, highlighting joint efforts in in EU-funded projects across various policy areas. This partnership was strengthened through a cooperation agreement signed during the CPMR General Assembly on 20 September 2019, in Palermo, Sicily Region (Italy). The Black Sea region, alongside neighbouring areas like the South Caucasus, East Mediterranean and Middle East face significant challenges that hinder intra-regional and interregional cooperation, stemming from both human and nature-driven factors. These challenges include conflicts, corruption, climate change, and environmental degradation, necessitating collaborative efforts to address them effectively. The 13th International Black Symposium recently held in Athens (i.e., on the 2nd of November 2023) focused on “The Black Sea in Crisis: Challenges and Opportunities in an Istanbul Environment”. This event addressed the severe impacts of the climate crisis in the region, worsened by regional conflicts, corruption, inequality, low economic growth, and brain drain. The participants’ discussions focused on identifying measures to mitigate these challenges and leverage opportunities for regional development.

One key area of focus is the support for blue economy sectors, recognised as vital for sustainable development. The Black Sea research and business communities are actively engaged in initiatives to raise awareness and shape policy agendas, collaborating with regional stakeholders like the Balkan and Black Sea Commission. The importance of culture and tourism in driving economic development was highlighted together with a recently approved mural project aiming at promoting sustainable tourism practices tailored for less developed rural areas. Additionally, the ongoing 7th BSEC Month of Culture, an online cultural programme, showcases the rich heritage of the Black Sea region until the 30th of November 2023. More information about events, projects, and research outcomes can be found on the International Black Symposium website and social media channels. Mr MITRAKOS concluded by stressing the importance of continuing cooperation for achieving positive results.

Mr KALOGNOMOS continued the meeting by presenting the administrative issues and updated on the past and ongoing BBSC projects.

The Erasmus+ project, iSOL-MET (Innovative SOft SkilLs to Maritime Education and Training), recently closed, aimed to bridge the gap between academia and professional required skills in the Black Sea area. The project received recognition from the European Commission as a Black Sea “success story”, which aims to be presented at the Black Stakeholders Annual Conference in Bucharest by Mr MOLDOVEANU.

Additionally, the ongoing project BRIDGE-BS (Advancing Black Sea Research and Innovation to co-Develop Blue Growth within Resilient Ecosystems) under Horizon 2020 and the upcoming ones CUL-MAR-SKILLS (MARitime Soft Skills for Onboard Healthy Nutrition and CULinary Arts in Seagoing Services) under Erasmus+ and TOURAL (Multidimensional model of tourism verticals
driving the sustainable balanced growth among rural & remote grids and urban clusters of rural regions, fostering macro-regional cooperation) under Horizon Europe were presented.

**CUL-MAR-SKILLS** provides training in areas such as balanced and healthy nutrition, provisions, environmentally friendly practices in the galley and waste management. The most innovative aspect of the project is that it provides basic knowledge in areas that have not been covered much in the maritime sector and aims to provide participants with skills in key areas such as cooking, supply chain, management, entrepreneurship and make them sought-after employees who will work in a limited space such as a ship. It focuses on digitising traditional recipes of the Black Sea region for seafarers. The University of the Aegean (North and South Aegean Regions, CPMR BBSC members) is among the project partners.

**TOURAL** emphasises rural and cultural tourism in the Adriatic-Ionian and Black Sea regions. It supports touristic development of rural regions balancing the growth of their urban areas, more popular and touristic, with the growth potential of their remote and rural areas. The Association Local Action Group Danube Delta (GAL DD) (Tulcea County Council, CPMR BBSC member) is among the project partners.

Newly started, **Crete Valley** is a project funded by the Horizon Europe programme, aiming to make Crete Region a sustainable energy hub by 2028. Led by the Institute of Communication and Computer Systems of the National Technical University of Athens (ICCS), Crete Valley plans to create a Renewable Energy Valley “Living Lab” (REV-Lab) that combines advanced technology and augmented reality with social aspects and efficient business models.

This initiative will demonstrate sustainable and cost-effective production and storage of renewable energy to meet the island’s energy needs. By developing the REV-Lab, Crete Valley project will support the EU REPowerEU Plan, promote local renewable energy solutions, create new jobs, and improve the security and autonomy of Crete’s energy supply. The CPMR BBSC will help disseminate the project results, develop policy recommendations, organise policy events, and support capacity building getting involved interested BBSC members.

The project received positive feedback at the 13th International Black Sea Symposium in Athens, and the Secretary General of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Black Sea Economic Cooperation (PABSEC), covering 13 countries in the wider Black Sea region, has shown particular interest in this renewable energy initiative.

The next point highlighted BBSC financial issues, urging prompt payment of membership fees to support policy work effectively. For the first time, the members’ collaboration within the BBSC showed positive financial outcomes, resulting from the BBSC’s successful participation in different EU-funded projects.

He recalled the need to update the 2024-2025 Action Plan. The priorities focus on the Adriatic-Ionian region, Western Balkans, and the Danube region, as well as the EU Black Sea Synergy and the Eastern Partnership. The importance of collaboration with other key organisations in the region and being actively involved in a wide array of EU-funded projects promoting regional and local development as well as the rich cultural heritage’s preservation was emphasised among others.

The BBSC participates in the Eastern Partnership Civil Society Forum (EaP CSF), network of non-governmental organisations focusing on the six Eastern Partnership countries (i.e., Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, Republic of Moldova, and Ukraine), exchanging on various topics,
and pursuing EU-funded projects. Collaboration with any BBSC members interested in this region is more than welcome.

In addition, the EU Strategy for Danube Region plays crucial role in the BBSC main areas of work and Ms Irina COZMA, Coordinator, EUSDR Priority Area 3 (Culture & Tourism), Ministry of Public Works, Development and Administration in Romania, underlined the importance of networking with the BBSC members and other entities across Europe, to foster regional cohesion and enhance collaboration. The Priority Area 3 focuses on culture, tourism and people-to-people contacts. Therefore, this collaboration is vital, according to Ms COZMA’s speech, for leveraging expertise and supporting EU projects aimed at local and regional cooperation and development. She informed on a new project’s start that emphasises on understanding how culture and tourism can drive community and regional growth. Moreover, strategic topics like promoting sustainable tourism and supporting contemporary arts were addressed, highlighting the importance of networking and various stakeholder implication. She called for participants to commit in supporting projects and collaboration efforts, emphasising the importance of sustainable cultural roots.

When it comes to the BBSC lobbying activities, Mr KALOGNOMOS reminded members the need to renew the SEArca Intergroup after the elections for the European Parliament on 6-9th June 2024 and to keep being actively involved in the Steering Committee meetings of the Interreg NEXT Black Sea Basin Programme.

Mr Lodovico GHERARDI, representing Emilia-Romagna Region (Italy), Managing Authority of the Interreg IPA ADRION Programme, explained how regional authorities can benefit from managing programmes and how others can benefit without being managing authority. He highlighted the importance of collaboration and synergy searching with other transnational and cross-border programmes to share experiences and capitalise on the projects that need to be in line of the Thematic Steering Groups flagships and works. Mr GHERARDI stressed the projects’ interconnection existing across programmes and regions, particularly in involving Western Balkan partners (Albania, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Montenegro, North Macedonia, Serbia) to increase opportunities for collaboration. He underlined the significance of strong partnerships and the need for involvement in organisations like the CPMR and its Balkan and Black Sea Commission to enhance regional development in the whole region. Finally, he concluded on Emilia-Romagna’s commitment to collaborating with such organisations to contribute to the development of the broader Southeastern European region.

Mr KALOGNOMOS reminded that the portfolios of the BBSC are in line with the CPMR main priorities and include some additional fields of priority. Maritime affairs are handled by Tulcea County Council, Samegrelo-Zemo Svaneti Region leads Transport and Skills, while energy and climate should still be allocated to a region interested in this topic. Western Greece Region is the leading partner of the CCRE-S3 thematic area, responsible for the coordination of the Adriatic-Ionian, Balkan, and wider Black Sea regions’ participants.

Mr Fokion ZAIMIS, 1st Vice-President of the CPMR Balkan & Black Sea Commission and Deputy Governor for Entrepreneurship, Research and Innovation at the Region of Western Greece, concluded the statutory meeting by updating on the progress made in the Mediterranean macroregional strategy, one of the priorities of the CPMR. He shared concerns about the current situation in Israel and Gaza. He called members for more collaboration and increasing membership. He congratulated Mr Kalognomos and Tulcea’s Presidency for their worthy initiatives and work done so far. As a newly re-elected member, he confirmed his commitment to
renewing their political representation and promoting the Balkan and Black Sea Commission’s goals. The Region of Western Greece aims, through the BBSC, at expanding its reach into neighbouring regions and enhancing efficiency.

Mr KALOGNOMOS informed that the date and venue of the next BBSC General Assembly, including elections for the next two-year President mandate, are yet to be determined. Discussion will take place with the current Presidency to consider options. Plans for online meetings to enhance cooperation with the Western Balkans and the Eastern Neighbourhood countries have been proposed. The minutes and Action Plan will be circulated for comments, with future meetings planned for Patras (Western Greece Region) and beyond.