



**CoR-CPMR CO-ORGANISED CONFERENCE
THE BALKAN AND THE BLACK SEA AREA ON THE MOVE:
PERSPECTIVES FOR REGIONAL AUTHORITIES**

European Committee of the Regions

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MINUTES

Welcome and introduction

Mr Markku Markkula, President of the European Committee of the Regions (CoR), welcomed all participants and expressed his pleasure to host this meeting. The CoR stressed the pressure on macro-regional policy both politically and at operational level, and our also on European values, such as decentralisation and good multilevel governance, of the key cornerstones of European development. Mr Markkula underlined the importance of the bottom-up approach. The Balkan and Black Sea area is a geopolitical crossroads at a crucial moment in time where we need to keep dialogue open with all partners, including Russia, and to build partnerships. The CoR called for the respect of international law and the agreements of European values, and condemned the annexation of Crimea. He expressed the belief that the current revision of the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP) shall result in a new pragmatic approach to possible people-to-people and city-to-city actions in the Black Sea despite international tensions. He referred to the fact that the Conference of the Regional and Local Authorities for the Eastern Partnership (CORLEAP) had recent success with the Riga Summit, in ensuring that priority was given to decentralisation and expressed the belief that the involvement of Associations of Local and Regional Authorities should be facilitated and a genuine multi-stakeholder approach should be implemented. When political instabilities and economic uncertainty shake the Region, cooperation becomes more necessary than ever and concrete work even on small scale is needed.

He highlighted the role of the CPMR in the Region and expressed the CoR's interest for cooperation.

Mr Dimitrios Petrovits, Alternate Member of the European Committee of the Regions and supporter of the co-organised Conference, Deputy Governor of Evros, Region of Eastern Macedonia-Thrace, Greece, welcomed participants and stressed the role of the CoR as the voice of Local and Regional Authorities in Europe and discussion partner of European Institutions and asked for the reinforcement of its role. He underlined the important role of the wider Balkan and Black Sea area in global geostrategic planning despite the important problems that may occur, and said that collaboration with Regions of non-EU Member States should have our support. Multipartite partnership schemes, that would encourage entrepreneurship and support youth, are a safe tool that may be brought by the participating countries. All strategies must take into consideration local needs,

regional proposals, and be funded in order to succeed. He expressed the readiness of the Region of Eastern Macedonia-Thrace to contribute with its proposals to a common strategy. The Region of Eastern Macedonia-Thrace will continue playing an active role in the CPMR/BBSRC also via the BBSRC headquarters in the city of Kavala, Region of Eastern Macedonia-Thrace. The platform offered by the CPMR is the ideal framework for this kind of effort.

Ms Eleni Marianou, CPMR Secretary General, thanked the hosts for their introductory remarks and underlined the role of the CPMR through the bottom-up approach in the Balkan and Black Sea area. She reminded participants that since all sea basins are not the same, the CPMR offers tailor-made solutions both in political and practical work, and referred to Commissioner Hahn's words that "the more practical we are, the more results we will obtain". Ms Marianou stressed the current problems in the area, such as the political crisis, the war at the EU's borders and the financial crisis, as well as the need to rebuild people's faith in the European project. The macro-regional approach is a good one because it can give results, such as in the Adriatic and the Mediterranean. The CPMR will try to push forward the multi-stakeholder approach. Ms Marianou underlined the competencies of Regions and the possibility to sort out some difficult conflicts through regional cooperation.

First Session: New EU Neighbourhood Policy, Regions must be heard

Mr Mircea Stoian, Tulcea County Councillor, President of the CPMR Balkan and Black Sea Regional Commission, in his [speech](#), thanked all participants and the CoR for hosting this Conference. He stressed that the current period is of high significance for Regional Authorities and welcomed the Joint Declaration of the Eastern Partnership Summit in Riga. Mr Stoian stated that Regional Authorities do matter and must be heard, and expressed his hope that this meeting will lead to a joint reflection that will enable stakeholders to build strong and extensive partnerships. He concluded by highlighting that peace, reconciliation and development in the area, can be achieved through intensified collaboration at all levels.

Mr Gerhard Schumann-Hitzler, Director, European Commission, Directorate-General Neighbourhood Policy and Enlargement Negotiations (DG NEAR), Neighbourhood East, recalled that the EU and the neighbouring countries are not just doing politics or business for themselves but for their citizens. What is interesting is that we keep an eye on the interest and expectations of the citizens and the businesses and the Local and Regional Authorities are the best to help us reach out to them. He highlighted the importance of creating win-win situations with a positive lasting impact on a maximum of people through cooperation, and of avoiding confrontation. In his [presentation](#), Mr Schumann-Hitzler, referred to the Black Sea Synergy, to the ENP review, as well as to the EU funding from the European Neighbourhood Instrument (ENI) for cooperation in the Black Sea Region. Regarding the review of the ENP, Mr Schumann-Hitzler thanked for all stakeholders for their contributions that will help European Commission to shape the right policy and decide on the right approach.

Mr Juraj Sevela, Assistant to Eduard Kukan, Member of the European Parliament, presented the contribution of the European Parliament to the EU Neighbourhood Policy review. Mr Sevela mentioned that cooperation in the time of instability and economic uncertainty is of utmost importance and especially cooperation at regional level and in general with neighbouring countries. Setting or reshaping the ENP is a challenge for EU External Policy, and there is a need to create a more responsive, more differentiated policy. The aim of the policy, back in 2004 when it was launched, was to create a stable and well-governed ring of countries around the EU, and have a democratic and prosperous neighbourhood. Nowadays the situation shows the limits where we can go. He said that Neighbourhood Policy should be based on its own merits and not be mixed with Enlargement Policy instruments and tools, and that we should use a more differentiated approach to our partners as "we do not have only two geographically different neighbourhoods but we have many neighbourhoods within the neighbourhood". The support for democracy, rule of law, and of human rights is at the core

of this Policy. Resources are limited but Local and Regional Authorities might be very efficient and are very much an important part of showing European knowhow to our neighbourhood. He concluded by saying that the European Parliament hopes that the new ENP has sharper tools and not give up the goals to create a more stable and more prosperous neighbourhood.

Mr Mick Antoniw, CORLEAP Bureau Member, Member of the National Assembly of Wales, United Kingdom, said that the need to develop partnerships and cooperation at the very lowest level (city and community) and bottom-up approach, rather than the top-down, is clear. In his [presentation](#), Mr Antoni referred to the current situation of the phenomena of regionalisation and to the geopolitical impact on the wider Black Sea area. He used the example of the conflict in Ukraine to present the impact on the Balkans and Black Sea area. In terms of developing those synergies and economic strategies, we have to move away from the “one-size-fits-all” to greater engagement. He said that in the Ukrainian case, decentralisation and fiscal autonomy were fundamental to achieving any form of economic strategy, and that national plans imposed without the engagement of the local and regional level are almost certainly bound to fail. The role of national governments is to develop spatial planning within which it takes place, but if there is no regional or local ownership in the development of these plans, the prospects for success are remote.

Ms Pauliina Haijanen, CORLEAP Member, Finland, GI Baltic Sea Regions, [presented](#) the composition, role and action plan of CORLEAP for 2014-2015, as well as the EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region ([EUSBSR](#)). The EUSBSR, as the first macro-regional strategy, was used as a pilot (since then two macro-regional strategies have followed, the EU Strategy for the Danube Region ([EUSDR](#)), and the EU Strategy for the Adriatic and Ionian Region ([EUSAIR](#))). Within the multilateral CORLEAP, relations between the European Committee of the Regions and Eastern Partnership countries have been increasing. Local and Regional Authorities can contribute substantially to the successful implementation of the new ENP if they are provided with the appropriate technical and financial instruments. The CoR has a specific role to play in the implementation of the reform process as far as centralisation is concerned. It can contribute at stimulating the necessary debate at local level, involving civil society organisations, government counterparts and all stakeholders. She said that there is no model at EU level to be followed and applied, as each country has its own way to identify the appropriate steps and undertake the necessary access. She concluded by saying that the role of local democracy and citizens’ participation in pursuing the roles of this reform is important.

Ms Eleni Marianou, CPMR Secretary General, summed up the issues that have been raised by the speakers during the session and opened the floor for questions from participants.

Mr Ahmet Yücel, Deputy Undersecretary to the Ministry for EU Affairs, Turkey, thanked all the speakers and mentioned that the EU was a project of regional peace in the beginning but today the EU is not limited to regional geography but is turning into a global peace project. He expressed the thought that as the neighbourhood and enlargement policies intertwine and they support each other, this approach needs to be at the forefront of all the assessment studies, and the hope that we will see this dynamism of the Neighbourhood Policy in the Enlargement Policy as well.

Mr Sergei Bezdolnii, former President of the International Black Sea Club (IBSC), Chairman of Duma, Head of City of Azov, Russia, said he completely agrees with the speakers about the need for development and cooperation. He referred to the role of the IBSC as an instrument for cooperation. As he said during the BBSRC Working Groups meeting ([minutes of the meeting](#)), there is a need for regional cooperation in order to foster the development of the economy, taking the environment into account.

Dr Zefi Dimadama, Director General, International Centre for Black Sea Studies (ICBSS), Athens, Greece, highlighted the ICBSS active work in the field of the environment with the initiative “Greening the Black Sea”. Despite conflicts and different approaches, the environment is a crucial

sector where the EU and the Black Sea countries can work together, and it is a first base, just like civil society and youth, to start working together at local and regional level.

Mr Vasily Gavrilo, First Secretary, Mission of Russia to the EU, asked for further information regarding Mr Sevela's statement that in the framework of the ENP after its revision, the European Parliament believes that more attention should be given to the relations of partner countries with their neighbours.

Dr Apostolos Papafotiou, Regional Councillor of Peloponnese, Greece, in charge of International Relations and European Programmes, focused on the environment and the common strategy that it imposes on the coastal countries of the Black Sea, EU Members or not. These countries should establish a common strategy in order to face the pressure of human activities along the coast of the Black Sea.

Mr Juraj Sevela, answered that when we talk about the ENP and that it should stand on its own feet, it means that we should not make mixed tools which are used to turn Enlargement Policy into Neighbourhood Policy. In many aspects, for the majority of the countries in the neighbourhood, the tools used for Enlargement Policy are not suitable. Although we still have ambitions for the countries which can fulfil the conditions to apply for EU membership, we still do not think that the tools are appropriate. However, the synergies between these two policies should be mutually supported. Regarding neighbours of neighbours, if we want to achieve certain goals, we need to use a broader concept and involve the neighbours of neighbours, and have this sort of triangular cooperation between the EU, the neighbouring countries and their neighbours whenever this is possible.

Mr Gerhard Schumann-Hitzler, answered that all speeches confirmed a little bit the approach that the European Commission tries to defend, which means that we have to cooperate, to have an open exchange of views, and we need to see problems in their context. He wondered whether a macro-regional strategy should be developed in the Black Sea area, and reminded participants that Russia is not only a neighbour of our neighbours but also our neighbour and we should be open to cooperation. Once again, he highlighted that cooperation and not confrontation is the only way forward and what the European Commission is interested in.

Ms Pauliina Haijanen, agreed with the representative of Turkey that peace and enlargement projects are two sides of the same coin. Closer cooperation with Russia and EU enlargement countries is not against somebody and we should have common goals and targets and only through this can we have success. In the Baltic Sea, the EUSBSR cannot be implemented without Russia since it is a crucial part of this strategy.

Ms Eleni Marianou thanked all participants and closed the session.

Second Session: Intensify the regional cooperation in the wider Balkan and Black Sea area

Mr Patrick Anvroin, Director at the CPMR, opened the session by providing information on EU programmes and instruments implemented in this vast area extending from the Adriatic-Ionian sea basins to the Black Sea basin, and introduced the speakers.

Mr Nils Jansons, European External Action Service, Deputy Head of Unit, Division for Eastern Partnership, Regional Cooperation and OSCE, welcomed the attention that the CoR and the CPMR are giving to Black Sea regional cooperation. In his [presentation](#), Mr Jansons said that as the EU is active in all sea basins surrounding it, the Black Sea basin cannot be an exception. After referring to the lessons learnt from the Black Sea Synergy, Mr Jansons mentioned other on-going initiatives in the Region and cooperation with regional organisations such as the Black Sea Commission and the Organisation of the Black Sea Economic Cooperation (BSEC), and concluded by stating that the EU will continue to use its strengths and the opportunities offered by the Lisbon Treaty, and will value

exchanges with all stakeholders in the Black Sea Region and examine ways to enhance further cooperation.

Mr Patrick Anvroin seized the opportunity to refer to the [Final Declaration](#) adopted that same morning by the CPMR/BBSRC Members, a document that would be taken into consideration for the CPMR reply to the consultation on the review of the ENP.

Mr Jean-Eric Paquet, Director, European Commission, Directorate-General Neighbourhood Policy and Enlargement Negotiations (DG NEAR), Western Balkans, mentioned that they do not work much with Regional Authorities in implementing the enlargement policy and the accession negotiations, as by nature it is a national and institutional-driven policy. At the same time, Local and Regional Authorities are key in terms of the democratic development of the countries and of the Region, being one additional level of governance in the country and key actors in the economic development. During the next 5 years, it is essential that all forces in the Region and in the countries, focus on the reforms needed to get this process moving forward. They are driven in part by the European acquis, but they are also increasingly centred on three fundamentals which are the rule of law, economic reforms and public administration reforms. Regions have a role to play in all of them.

Mr Svetoslav Stoyanov, Policy Officer, European Commission, Directorate-General Maritime Affairs and Fisheries (DG MARE), Maritime Policy Mediterranean and Black Sea, [presented](#) regional cooperation in the Balkan and Black Sea areas from the Integrated Maritime Policy perspective. In this regard, the European Commission tries to advocate for better use of the sea, working mainly with public administrations but also encouraging them to consult and work together with private stakeholders as entrepreneurs, members of the business society. Innovation, collaboration and clusters are encouraged. There is a lot of experience to be shared between sea basins and stakeholders. He mentioned the CPMR's contribution to encourage training ([Vasco Da Gama project](#) with DG MOVE) and said that DG MARE will have a perspective for the Black Sea. After mentioning the follow-up actions in the area, Mr Stoyanov underlined the importance of regional cooperation and invited participants to be proactive. **Ms Nicole Mot**, First Secretary, Permanent Representation of Romania to the EU asked Mr Stoyanov if, after the two stakeholders' conferences, the Commission plans to organise a follow-up meeting. **Mr Stoyanov** replied that such a meeting is likely to be convened once the correct outline of the cooperation project is prepared. **Mr Loukianos Klint**, Secretary for Economic and Commercial Affairs, Permanent Representation of Greece to the EU, asked whether the energy pillar includes energy efficiency as well. **Mr Stoyanov** answered that DG MARE services are not supporting energy efficiency actions.

Mr Nikolaos Emirzas, Executive Director, Organisation of the Black Sea Economic Cooperation ([BSEC](#)), stated that in the emerging world landscape, international and, in particular, regional organisations are attributed an important role. Mr Emirzas gave more information about the BSEC, whose activity affects regional cooperation in the wider Black Sea area, since it is a forum for the exchange of information on national developments, the sharing of best practices and know-how, for networking and the development of contacts between national experts. Moreover, BSEC provides an effective decision-making mechanism through the adoption of political declarations, which set general objectives for the enhancement of regional sector cooperation and through the development of legal instruments which provide specific goals and mechanisms for the achievement of these objectives. BSEC is also engaged in the support of projects with a regional impact. Mr Emirzas underlined the significance given by the BSEC regarding its relation with third parties and welcomed the interest expressed on increasing their cooperation.

Mr Ahmet Yücel, Deputy Undersecretary to the Ministry for EU Affairs, Turkey, presented a [short film](#) about cross-border cooperation under the European Neighbourhood and Partnership Instrument (ENPI). He stated that cooperation at regional level is very crucial to solve our common problems and he thanked the European Commission for this initiative. In his speech, Mr Yücel touched upon the

initiatives in this Region and Turkey's approach to dealing with those initiatives and provided some information regarding the environmental issue in the Black Sea basin. He highlighted the particular strategic location of Turkey, at the juncture of the Balkans, Middle East, Mediterranean and Black Sea basins, and the willingness of Turkey to contribute to all initiatives which aim to ensure economic development, stability, and security in this Region. Territorial cooperation aiming to overcome the common challenge of border Regions is high on the agenda of Turkey as a candidate country to the EU.

He underlined the fact that Turkey attaches great importance to collaboration with all Black Sea countries, to overcome the challenge of environmental problems, also as a part of the Convention on the Protection of the Black Sea against Pollution. Turkey has taken many important steps aligning with EU environmental standards. With an approach aiming at sustainable development, environmental legislation and standards have been improved, institutional and technical infrastructure has been enhanced and projects towards strengthening environmental management have been implemented. As it is not possible to tackle environmental problems across the whole Black Sea Region with the effort of only one country or only by central administrations, regional cooperation among the countries as well as among local administrations on environmental protection and conservation should be enhanced. He concluded by stating that Turkey is eager to support the cooperation efforts in the Balkan and Black Sea Region that it shares with other countries.

Ms Laura Bobarnac, Programme Manager, Joint Managing Authority of the Black Sea Basin European Neighbourhood Instrument Cross-Border Cooperation Programme 2014-2020, Ministry of Regional Development and Public Administration, Romania, in her [presentation](#) provided information on the development of the ENPI CBC 2007-2013 to the ENI CBC 2014-2020 Black Sea Basin Programme and proceeded with further details on the new programme. With an eligible area a bit different from the previous programme and total funding of 54 million Euros, this programme aims at improving the welfare of the people in the Black Sea Basin Regions through sustainable growth and joint environmental protection, and more precisely by promoting business and entrepreneurship within the Black Sea Basin, as well as by promoting coordination of environmental protection and joint reduction of marine litter within the Black Sea Basin. Mr Bobarnac presented the types of potential beneficiaries and concluded by providing an indicative timetable, with the 1st Call for Proposals to open during the second trimester of 2016.

Mr Patrick Anvroin thanked all speakers and welcomed Ms Hanna Jans, Adviser to Commissioner Johannes Hahn, responsible for European Neighbourhood Policy and Enlargement Negotiations.

Closing Session

Ms Hanna Jans, Adviser to Commissioner Johannes Hahn, responsible for European Neighbourhood Policy and Enlargement Negotiations, in the field of Eastern Partnership including Black Sea Synergy and financial cooperation with neighbourhood countries (ENI), thanked the hosts for the invitation to the Commissioner and apologised for being unable to participate. Ms Jans referred to the collaboration that Commissioner Johannes Hahn had with the CPMR during his mandate as Commissioner responsible for Regional Policy and concentrated her concluding remarks on the Black Sea Region, the Western Balkans, and on the ENP review. Cross-border cooperation among the Black Sea countries is key. There are also other regional initiatives that they would like to continue and go beyond the very simple geographical scope of the Black Sea, and there are very active Local Authorities in the basin. In the future they would like to see more targeted actions, more improved connectivity and concentration of projects on certain areas that are really of major benefit for societies. With regard to the Western Balkans, it is quite remarkable because the readiness of the countries to embark on cross-border cooperation is a very positive sign because of the very recent history of the conflicts, and this is what the programmes also want, to be a bridge to reconcile. In the Western Balkans they would also like to develop the interconnectivity infrastructure projects in transport, energy and

telecommunications. Ms Jans concluded by mentioning the four key elements of the ENP review: focus, differentiation, flexibility, and ownership. Ms Jans underlined the importance of the bottom-up approach in the ENP review and encouraged all stakeholders to take part in the consultation, so that the new ENP will respond to their needs and will be practical and pragmatic. She concluded by passing on the Commissioner's wish for success with the challenges of the new programmes.

Mr Mircea Stoian, President of the CPMR Balkan and Black Sea Regional Commission, concluded the Conference by presenting some perspectives from the Regional Authorities. He said that today's initiative was based on three essential elements: a practical concrete approach, common efforts, and a bottom-up approach. As the CoR President, Mr Markkula said, it is very important to develop the Region, especially in the larger area of the Balkan and the Black Sea. We need channels of cooperation in order to ensure stability in the Region, and for the future of Europe it is very important for the Balkans and the Black Sea to remain a prosperous, peaceful area, and that is why the involvement of all social factors, and interregional structures is needed. Mr Petrovits had mentioned that regional cooperation is needed especially in the Black Sea area, in the Balkan area we need strong connections between different approaches and between human relationships. Closing the session, Mr Stoian referred to the [Final Declaration](#) adopted the same morning by the CPMR/BBSRC Members.