



# The Black Sea - Confrontation or Cooperation?

Varna Forum 2.0 Thinking Together

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Varna, Bulgaria



The Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung  
The Solidarity Society Foundation  
The Economics and International Relations Institute

**VARNA FORUM 2.0**  
**THINKING TOGETHER**

# **THE BLACK SEA - CONFRONTATION OR COOPERATION?**

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Is there an alternative to confrontation in the Black Sea Region (BSR)? Could a potentially eruptive region engage into the path of de-escalation of tension? Is dialogue possible between confronting states – and could a peaceful solution be found without a dialogue? Is cooperation unthinkable alongside numerous “frozen” and “hot” conflicts? Could the EU be a factor of stability in the Black Sea (BS) without a clear-cut strategy for the region? Is there a chance that the EU macroregional concept be applicable to the BSR? Moreover, could that be the chance for both the Black Sea Region and the EU?

These and many other questions were discussed at the “Thinking Together” Varna Forum 2.0 entitled “The Black Sea: Confrontation or Cooperation?” (May 12 – 14, 2017). The “Friedrich Ebert” Stiftung, the Solidarity Society Foundation, and the Economics and International Relations Institute had organized this event. It followed the first “Thinking Together” Varna Forum (May 29 – 31, 2015), which had set the beginning of a dedicated political discussion on the common challenges to the Black Sea Region and the prospects for stabilizing developments in the region.

The debate engaging participants from the BS countries, EU member states, the European Commission, and regional and international organizations ran along the following guiding ideas:

## **The Black Sea – a European Backwater or a European Macro Region?**

- The present state of cooperation in the Black Sea region – the Black Sea Synergy; EU supported programs; BSEC – driven; other - in the light of the 2030 Sustainable Development Goals perspective;
- The EU Macro-Regional Strategy approach to European territorial cooperation – present state and post-2020 prospects;
- The possibilities for launching a new European Black Sea Macro-Region under the successive Bulgarian and Rumanian Presidencies of the Council of the EU.

## **The Black Sea – Borderline or Bridge for the European Union Eurasian Economic Union Interaction?**

- The dawning of a new post-neoliberal globalization era and the emergence of transcontinental constellations shaping a new global order;
- The “One Belt – One Road” paradigm as one of the leading forces shaping the trans-European perspective regarding the interaction with Asia;
- The Black Sea as a potential key interface for dynamic expansion of comprehensive European - Eurasian interaction.

## **The Black Sea Space – Minefield or Pillar in the Evolving European Security Landscape?**

- The growing military build-up and confrontation between NATO and the Russian Federation in and around the Black Sea;
- The Black Sea in the context of the broader European security landscape;
- Specific challenges for European security emanating from conflicts in the region.

The aim of the discussions was to examine the potential for synergies between existing sectoral programs by means of a strategy for a new generation Black Sea MacroRegion for sustainable development and to bring the idea to the attention of European institutions and public opinion in the BS countries.

At present, the Black Sea is rapidly turning into an area of growing confrontation and military build-up. This tendency however runs counter to the major potential for the sustainable development of the region due both to the underutilized resources of the Black Sea area itself, as well as in light of the new strategic routes of trade and economic interaction evolving along the European/Euro Atlantic - Eurasian axis.

A decade ago, the EU put in place a Black Sea Synergy as a framework for a coherent approach for development of the region. At present, there are a number of sectoral activities covering the Black Sea, such as the Blue Economy program under the EU’s maritime policy and the Black Sea Basin format. However, neither the limited results from the Black Sea Synergy nor the present sectoral approach can provide the necessary framework for an overarching future-oriented strategy harnessing the significant potential for transforming the Black Sea from an area of rivalry and confrontation into a region of comprehensive and deepening cooperation.

Hence, a new initiative should aim at designing an up-to-date EU strategy for the all-round development of the Black Sea as a new European macroregion as part of the overall evolution of post 2020 European Territorial Cooperation within the context of the Sustainable Development Goals paradigm.

The Black Sea Economic Cooperation (BSEC) format could be utilized as a most important format for building support by the countries of the region directly interested in such an initiative. BSEC experience and expertise no doubt represent a most valuable potential input for such an effort. The same is true for such non-governmental entities as the Conference of Peripheral and Maritime Regions, which provide on-the-spot practical experience of cooperation between directly interested stakeholders.

The upcoming presidencies of the Council of the European Union by Bulgaria (in the first half of 2018) and by Romania (a year later) offer an opportunity for the two countries to elaborate and put in place a new strategy for the Black Sea. Such a strategy should be in line with the general evolution of the Union's 2030 policy horizon and would aim at ensuring the best use of the EU resources by targeting them towards the achievement of clear and measurable long-term objectives.

Basing themselves on the overall assessment of current processes and developments in the region, the Conclusions adopted by the Varna Forum 2.0 underline that the experience accumulated over the years by BSR countries, particularly in implementing the EU Synergy Initiative and the BSEC projects, constitutes a useful foundation for upgrading the existing formats of regional cooperation. The concept of an EU macro-region under a strategy specifically developed for the BSR could be regarded as a creative contribution to that end.

In this regard, the participants shared the view that the 2018 Bulgarian Presidency might wish to find a suitable way to encourage the Council of the European Union to agree on a mandate for an EU macroregion in the BSR. Such a mandate could invite the European Commission to present to the Council a macroregional strategy for the Black Sea Region by June 2020 at the latest. This strategy would comprehensively address cooperation related to infrastructure development; tourism and cultural exchange; maritime transportation; fishery management; energy supplies; controlling migration; environmental protection and climate change; regional confidence- and security-building measures, and suitable European Eurasian economic interaction.

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## Video message

***Karmenu VELLA, EU Commissioner for Environment, Maritime Affairs and Fisheries***



Ladies and gentlemen,

Thank you for giving me the opportunity to address you today.

The Varna Forum's motto is 'Thinking Together'.

To that, I would like to add the European Union's philosophy of 'working together'.

In the European Union, we believe that challenges are best overcome by working with, not against each other. This spirit is encoded in the very DNA of our common European project.

One area where we need to work together more is the ocean-based 'blue' economy.

Our seas and oceans can provide people good jobs and stable incomes. Blue growth can put food on the table and money in the bank.

In traditional sectors like shipbuilding, aquaculture or coastal tourism. And in exciting new sectors like marine biotech.

But only if we work together:

- To boost investment and remove bottlenecks to growth,
- To plan the use of our maritime space, and critically
- To keep our seas and oceans healthy.

That is why the European Union is encouraging cooperation at all levels: from town halls to ministries to regional organisations.

And we have the Black Sea region firmly in our sights.

We have provided 1.5 million euros to help our two Black Sea Member States – Bulgaria and Romania – join forces on maritime spatial planning.

We are also funding - with 1 million euros - work by the Bulgarian Institute of Oceanology and its Romanian partners. Together they are carrying out a joint stress test of marine observation systems.

But in the Black Sea region especially, working together also means reaching out to our neighbours.

Take fisheries. For years now, fish stocks in the region are in an alarming state of decline.

But stocks in the Black Sea are shared between countries. Therefore, the only effective action is collective action.

The GFCM Bucharest Declaration signed by all Black Sea countries in October 2016 shows that progress is possible wherever there is real political will.

And looking ahead, the European Union wants to work with our neighbours to develop a shared vision of the region's maritime future. We will be supporting this work with 1 million euros from our soon-to-be-launched Facility for Blue Economy Development.

I am convinced that a shared, regional "blue economy" strategy will send a strong message to investors. It will show them that the Black Sea region is open for business.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Our success – in fisheries and other sectors of the blue economy – will depend above all on you.

Your ideas, your commitment, your action.

So, please use today to share your thoughts. How do we make sustainable "blue growth" happen in the Black Sea region? What else can the European Union do to support you?

I am very much looking forward to the outcome of the Varna Forum.

I would also like to encourage you to continue the conversation in September, at the next Black Sea stakeholder meeting that the European Commission is organising in Batumi, Georgia. You are all kindly invited.

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## Keynote Statement

***Michael Christides, Secretary-General, Permanent International Secretariat (PERMIS) of the Black Sea Economic Cooperation (BSEC) Organisation***



Ladies and Gentlemen,

I wish to thank the organizers, the Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung and my old friend, Minister Georgi Pirinski, for honouring me with their invitation to this important event. Indeed, it is a privilege for me to address this distinguished audience on an issue of paramount importance, given the troubled and uncertain times not only the wider Black Sea region but, in fact, the whole world, is going through.

We certainly live today in a multipolar world, with the one real superpower apparently losing influence and, at the same time, being challenged by big powers like China and Russia and other regional powers, all of which aspire to assume greater roles.

Looking closer at home, to Europe, well, the continent was never in a more precarious situation; just consider: economic malaise, unemployment, Euro-scepticism, fragmentation, nationalism, Brexit, xenophobia, refugee crisis, far right political parties on the surge, isolationism, etc.

The year 2017 is very important for Europe: elections were held in Holland and France, in September they will take place in Germany, later perhaps also in Italy. The results of these elections will decisively influence developments on our Continent.

Even if far-right parties do not get into power, as was the case, thank God, in Holland and France, they will influence policies of the Parties in power. This could mean more Euroscepticism, consolidation of groupings inside the EU, more regional agendas, etc., perhaps even more referenda on Euro-exits!

One has the impression that the old division of Europe (and the World) between "East" and "West" is becoming relevant again today, placing the Black Sea region on the forefront, as the only difference from the past seems to be that the meeting (or, confrontation) line between the two sides in Europe has shifted somewhat to the East, in fact, to the Black Sea coastline.

Focusing on our area, the wider Black Sea region, it is unfortunate that it again seems to be one of the focal points of tension and conflict, with very weak expectations that we could perceive some ray of hope for compromise and detente in the near future.

One has only to look the latest developments in the Baltics and the wider Black Sea region, with the increase of weapons and military capabilities on both sides, which, given the persisting misunderstandings and phobias among the States concerned, do not augur well for the immediate future.

Two words on the USA, since the Trump era seems to be introducing a completely different relationship between the only super power and its allies on the old continent:

Apart from the unpredictability of the new US President, there is no doubt that the USA looks tired of its role! The average US citizen wishes to take a closer look and repair things back home (a popular movement was born in the US, which unexpectedly brought President Trump to power and which the mainstream Media failed to detect, study and report on).

The main question mark – especially in the frame of our discussion – is how President Trump will influence the US-Russia (and US-China) relationship.

I believe that the US will continue its efforts to counter the westward drive of Russia's influence, so NATO will be present, most probably in greater numbers than today, in European frontier states to Russia. But Washington with Trump at the helm, might also show more flexible attitude on sanctions, perhaps even in the interpretation of the Minsk Protocols, especially if Russia and the US manage to agree on some common ground in Syria and the fight against ISIS. Many analysts believe in an initial improvement – or, even, a perception of improvement – in US-Russian relations, but it is obviously too early to confirm the above.

In fact, some experts believe that there is already an increasing nervousness and bewilderment in Moscow on how to approach the new, unpredictable US President Trump. I do not know if the last visit of Minister Lavrov to the White House shed any light in this respect!

Talking about the "East" one has to mention **China**, especially given its consistent drive during the last years to invest and be present on the European scene, especially through its "One Belt-One Road" project, which concerns the establishment of a dense web of connectivity from China to Europe. The Black Sea region stands right in the middle of this project and could exploit to its benefit this new factor in shaping world and regional affairs.

In conclusion, I believe that under today's circumstances and if developments evolve as described above, the Black Sea region is certainly a focal point of friction and conflict, yet, at the same time and under some particular circumstances, it could also become an important factor for bridging the existing gaps. "It could become a potential key interface for a dynamic and comprehensive European-Eurasian interaction", as my friend Mr. Pirinski says.

Yet, there is an important barrier for that to happen: the overall security situation in the region, as shaped and influenced by the various regional and bilateral conflicts existing today.

Will we go on with the military build-up in the region, or will we witness a better understanding of overall security concerns and try to formulate a broader security landscape, that will allow greater and enhanced economic cooperation among the States?

This is a question I cannot answer, given the fluidity of events taking place, but the second option is certainly the path we should follow!

Here the idea of promoting the establishment of a European Macro-Region–Strategy falls into place and can be one of the main vehicles to improve the overall situation in our region.

However, before elaborating more on this idea, allow me to add two words on the BSEC Organization, which I have the honour to represent; BSEC tries to influence positively the situation by promoting the economic cooperation among its Members, that is, it approaches the security issue from its economic dimension.

Mind you, the BSEC Member States – some of which do not even maintain diplomatic relations or face serious bilateral problems – are, indeed, a non-homogenous group, with different historical backgrounds, diverse levels of development and varying political and economic priorities.

Yet, for 25 years, the Organization was a consistent and effective vehicle of cooperation – in many sectors. We established a **culture of dialogue** among our Member States, as well as many **networks of cooperation** in various sectors. We sit around a table many times during the year, discussing and promoting projects of common interest. In a way, we already function as an initial **confidence-building mechanism**. This was and still is the **added value** of the BSEC Organization.

The overarching priority now is to tap the vast potential of the region, in terms of both social and economic development, in particular through the promotion of trans-boundary cooperation.

This is an enormous task that necessitates the involvement and support by many – if not by all! Thus, we believe that the establishment of a EU Macro-Region–Strategy, if well thought of and meticulously prepared, can prove to be a valuable vehicle to transform the BSR into a secure and stable Cooperation area.

I hope that out of today's meeting we can draw the right conclusions and prepare the next steps for the realization of this ambitious idea, on which I again wish to congratulate its masterminds!

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## Discussion Facilitation Paper

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*Member of the European Parliament,  
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This paper provides a number of considerations for discussion at the Varna Forum 2.0 (2017), which relate to the merits and the prospects for elaboration and adoption of a 21-st century European Macro-Regional Strategy (MRS) for the Black Sea Region<sup>1</sup> (BSR). The paper builds upon the proceedings of the Varna Forum 1.0 (29-31 May 2015) with the aim of outlining a series of actions leading to an EU decision on such MRS during the Bulgarian and the Romanian Presidencies of the Council of the European Union (EU) in the first halves of 2018 and 2019, respectively.

### 1. Launching a New EU Macro-Region in the BSR

In its Global Strategy for the EU Foreign and Security Policy of June 2016, the EU commits itself to active support of “voluntary forms of regional governance that offer states and peoples the opportunity to manage better security concerns, reap the economic gains of globalization, express more fully cultures and identities, and project influence in world affairs.” To this effect, the EU intends to “promote and support cooperative regional orders worldwide, including in the most divided areas”.

Furthermore, as “regional orders do not take a single form”, the EU plans to “support regional organizations”, “where possible and whenever in line with the Union’s interests”. Hence, the establishment of **an EU macro-region in the BSR** should aim at implementing an up-to-date EU strategy for comprehensive development of the BSR as part of the overall evolution of the post-2020 European Territorial Cooperation in the context of the UN Sustainable Development Goals.

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<sup>1</sup> The “Black Sea Region” (BSR) is a geographical area encompassing the Black Sea basin and the territories of the six bordering countries - Bulgaria, Georgia, Romania, Russia, Turkey, and Ukraine (sometimes called “Black Sea Space” (BSS)), considered together with four of their neighboring countries - Armenia, Azerbaijan, Greece, and Moldova. The latter countries are geographically and functionally associated with the Black Sea, the Caspian Sea and the Mediterranean Sea for reasons of their location and national interests in taking part in the regional cooperation affecting the climate of economic prosperity, security and stability in the wider area connecting Europe, Asia and the Middle East.

The Varna Forum 2.0 may wish to discuss the merits of establishing a macro-regional strategy for the BSR and the modalities for an actionable approach to this end, including the following questions:

- Given that the Black Sea Synergy framework remains insufficiently developed, should it be upgraded to and replaced by the more comprehensive macroregional concept?
- Does the present evolution of the regional and the global contexts favor such an upgrading of the EU approach to cooperation in the region of the Black Sea?
- How should the considerable security challenges in the region be evaluated and taken into account when examining the prospect for an EU Black Sea MRS?
- Could the inclusion of Russia, which is a participant in the existing Black Sea Synergy cooperation, provide a meaningful input necessary for the delivery of practical results from a new MRS?
- How can the lessons from the EU macro-regional strategies for the Baltic Sea, the Danube River, the Adriatic and Ionian Seas, and the Alpine areas, be used to facilitate the development of an EU macro-region for the Black Sea region?

## 2. The Overall Background

### 2.1. The Emerging New Global Framework

#### a) *Climate of Change*

Varna Forum 2.0 meets at a time of critical reassessment of the neoliberal and neoconservative economic models. The 2014 Oxfam report “Working for the Few”, drawn up for the World Economic Forum at Davos points out that: almost half of the world’s wealth is now owned by just 1 % of the population, with the possessions of the 1% wealthiest individuals amounting to \$110 trillion, i.e.65 times the total wealth of the bottom half of the world’s population. Hence, both the neoliberal and the neoconservative globalization paradigms are now broadly seen as inefficient, if not definitively counterproductive as formats for seeking sustainable socio-economic progress.

Political economists prompted by national elections seeking “political elites change” have already started examining trans-continental modalities capable of shaping a more sustainable world economic order. This process will likely take time and has uncertain results. The leading world economic powers (e.g. G-7 and G-20) are increasingly focusing on reformist projects, some of which might affect the BSR countries as well. Therefore, ***any ambitious plans for joint sectoral activities and cooperation in the BSR under the EU “macro-regional” flag should examine its merits and future scope of implementation from global and regional economic perspectives.***

As to Europe, the 2016 “Brexit referendum” in the United Kingdom has started a process that has brought about the most profound crisis of the EU in its 60-year history. The EU Global Strategy for Foreign and Security Policy (FSP) has recognized that European societies “live in times of existential crisis, within and beyond the EU” and that “the Union is under threat”. To the east, the European security order has been fractured, while terrorism and violence plague North Africa and the Middle East, affecting Europe itself. Furthermore, the 2017 EC White Paper on the Future of Europe and the Rome Declaration of the EU leaders on the 60-th anniversary of the Union, have acknowledged that the EU is “facing unprecedented challenges, both



global and domestic," including "regional conflicts, terrorism, growing migratory pressures, protectionism, and social and economic inequalities. "At the same time, the EU leaders have emphasized the great accomplishments and further aspirations of this "unique Union with common institutions and strong values, a community of peace, freedom, democracy, human rights and the rule of law."

Yet, these are times of extraordinary opportunities for all EU Member States, including its BSR Member States. The EU today is called upon more than ever before to navigate the difficult, more connected, contested and complex world, which is guided and bolstered by shared interests, principles and policies. Building upon its many strengths and historic achievements, the EU seems well placed to continue playing its significant political and economic role in global and European affairs. It is expected that the forthcoming discussions within and among EU Member States on the ways forward to a "common future" will indicate, inter alia, the general political framework for any new EU macroregional endeavour, including the initiative for an EU macro-regional strategy for the BSR.

In general, the ever more evident "climate of change" seems to have underlined the need for ensuring stable peace, regional coordination and sustainable economic development, both on global and regional scales. As regards the BSR, the protracted ("frozen") bilateral conflicts in this region persist in hampering the development of a political atmosphere favoring enhanced regional cooperation. In addition, energy supply controversies, political upheavals and recurring military pressures in the Black Sea inspired by geostrategic interests mainly, pose major challenges to the pace of development of such cooperation.

In this context, gradual improvement of the bilateral relations between Washington and Moscow in the aftermath of the 2016 presidential elections in the U.S.A., if still possible against the recent polemics on hot international issues, particularly vis-à-vis Crimea and Syria, could positively affect the prospects for multilateral cooperation in and around the Black Sea. It is hoped that the urgent need for coordinated or joint U.S. - Russian counter-terrorism actions, focusing on fighting ISIS operations in the Middle East, would bring about a better bilateral climate with positive impact on the whole spectrum of international relations.

The BSR countries themselves could further enhance the positive patterns of regional cooperation on matters of common interest, thus contributing to a new regional atmosphere and a better spirit of interaction. This process would continue to require outside support in securing its success, including through the EU partnership and enlargement programmes. Most importantly, regional rapprochement must count on the ability and the political will of BSR governments to define and defend their shared economic, social and security interests in constructive interaction with broader strategic priorities and power projections.

### ***b) The 2030 Sustainable Development Goals Perspective***

The EU keeps a close eye on the complex issues of ***international ocean governance, which include challenges to maritime areas like the Mediterranean Sea and the Black Sea***. In this respect, the EU believes that "climate change, poverty and food security are global matters that could effectively be addressed, if oceans are better protected and sustainably managed". To this end, and building upon its Blue Growth Strategy adopted in 2012 (to serve as "a driver for welfare and prosperity" in maritime cooperation), on 10 November 2016, the European Commission (EC) and the High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy (FASP) issued a Joint Communication proposing actions for safe, secure, clean and sustainably managed oceans.

This initiative was undertaken as part of ***the EU response to the UN 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development***, in particular, Goal No 14 entitled "to conserve and sustainably use the

oceans, seas and marine resources". The response was initially based on the political mandate from the EC President to the EC Commissioner for Environment, Maritime Affairs and Fisheries "to engage in shaping international ocean governance in the UN, in other multilateral fora and bilaterally with key global partners". The 2016 Joint Communication outlined 14 sets of actions in three priority areas: (a) improving the international ocean governance framework; (b) reducing human pressure on oceans and creating conditions for a sustainable blue economy; and (c) strengthening international ocean research and data.

As regards the new EU macro-regional strategies and sea basin initiatives concerning the entire Europe, the EC has achieved a lot by focusing on the "blue growth" perspective but also by moving ahead in several specific maritime areas of cooperation, including ocean energy technologies, marine research, sustainable aquaculture production, and coastal and maritime tourism. In this context, the EC<sup>2</sup> has most recently recalled that "the Environment, Maritime Affairs and Fisheries Fund is creating three routes highlighting underwater cultural heritage in the Mediterranean Sea and the Black Sea, which cover activities from shipwrecks and ancient artefacts to underwater landscapes and artificial reefs". Looking beyond research objectives in this field, the EC also emphasized "the success of wide strategies in the Atlantic, the Baltic, the Adriatic-Ionian, and in the western Mediterranean". In addition, **while recalling that "regional cooperation approaches have been established in the Arctic", the Commission pointed that it "intends to develop a similar approach to the Black Sea."**

### c) The "One Belt, One Road" Platform

China's 2013 "One Belt, One Road" trans-continental project (the "Belt & Road Initiative") constitutes another "game changer", representing a programme with the potential to transform global communication, business and economic modalities. The project is **a long-term endeavor that calls for massive investments and development of trade routes traversing also the BSR space.**

The "One Belt, One Road" concept seems to have the potential to be the world's largest platform for regional collaboration. What the initiative's authors call "the Road" is actually the ancient Silk Road with an ambitious scale covering about 65 % of the world's population, approximately onethird of the world's GDP, and about a quarter of the goods and services that the world transports.

Political observers consider this economic concept as a "second Marshall Plan", which could produce results similar to those achieved in postWW2 Europe. Four years after its launch, the "Belt & Road Initiative" remains a very long-term project with major investors hesitating to employ financial resources on such a scale and for indefinite duration. China, aiming to address such concerns, is putting together implementing consortiums of banks and funds. **What needs to happen, however, is for the interested parties from the respective regions along the route, including the BSR, to consider possible inclusion of this initiative in their own plans and projections.**

Inevitably, "the Belt" affects EU security interests in both Central and South Asia, which are still being defined. Greater interconnectivity potentially facilitated by "the Belt" gives the EU impetus to think more strategically and to contribute more proactively to stability outside of its immediate neighbourhood. This, however, requires the EU to develop its own strategic vision for stability and security in Eurasia as a whole, and the role it sees for itself and stakeholders within this framework. This would be a starting point from which the EU can assess "the Belt" initiative, both politically and conceptually. An initiative by the EU Member States in the BSR to develop a macro-regional strategy of the Union for this region could stimulate Brussels to

<sup>2</sup> Ref.: Statement by Commissioner Karmenu Vella for Environment, Maritime Affairs and Fisheries to the "Informal Ministerial Conference on Blue Growth, Ocean Governance in the EU and the Mediterranean, Innovation and Nautical Tourism" (Malta, 19 – 20 April 2017).

formulate further elements of its strategic vision vis-à-vis Eurasian events and trends.

The **inclusion of the “the Belt & Road” subject as a discussion item on the BSR macro-regional agenda** could focus on the prospect for the Black Sea Region to evolve as a key interface for dynamic expansion of a more comprehensive European - Eurasian interaction.

## 2.2 The Accumulated Regional Experience

### **a) BSEC: 25 Years of Multilateral Regional Cooperation**

In 1992, the BSR countries launched a joint project for regional cooperation focusing on economic matters of mutual interest - the Black Sea Economic Cooperation, which has become a fully-fledged international organization recognized by the UN in 1998. Twenty-five years later, in 2017, the participating countries are able to justifiably highlight a number of common practical achievements.

Perhaps even more importantly, the BSEC and its Parliamentary Assembly at present continue to provide a unique platform for political dialogue and informal consultations between BSR countries that otherwise would not take place due to diverging or conflicting interests and policies. The result is the creation of important confidence-building effects with meaningful positive projections, for instance the current discussion on the elaboration of an EU macro-regional strategy for the BSR.

The EU has been providing an important input with its conceptual, political, strategic and financial support encouraging a wide range of cooperation in the BSR. As to BSEC, the organization prefers to participate in more EU projects than it does currently, which are few projects in the EU Programme for Research and Technological Development, as well as in the CrossBorder Programme for the Black Sea basin. The BSEC would also like the EU to be more involved in its two regional flagship projects, the so-called Black Sea Ring Highway and the Black Sea Motorways.

However, whenever BSEC's proposals endeavor to go beyond particular regional cooperation projects, the EU and the three EU Member States from the BSR seem to have preferred remaining within the project format. This is the case, for example, with the agreement among some BSEC countries to issue transit papers valid for road transporters. In the case of the two “flagship projects” mentioned above, some of their subprojects do not coincide with the larger plans of the EU under the European Trans-European Networks. In other cases, the EU's strict rules on open competition sometimes conflict with BSEC's rules, e.g. on ideas for alternative energy supply routes through BSEC countries (e.g. Bulgaria).

### **b) The Black Sea Synergy**

Ten years ago, the EU, right after the accession to it of Bulgaria and Romania on 1 January 2007, put in place the so-called **Black Sea Synergy Initiative**. It was designed as a flexible framework for more coherent BSR economic cooperation and policy guidance, while also inviting a more integrated approach. However, some EU member states, while strongly supporting a new Eastern Partnership, viewed the Black Sea Synergy as a threat to the development of that specific partnership. Therefore, since 2008 **these two EU policies have evolved in parallel but at different speeds**. On one hand, the Eastern Partnership has held governmental meetings at all levels, sectoral platforms, and various networks including civil society. The Black Sea Synergy, on the other hand, has not progressed beyond modest sectoral partnerships and has been slowed down by limited funding.

Despite the Black Sea Synergy's challenging initial circumstances, **there has been some prac-**



**tical progress in its implementation, which forms a substantive basis for its upgrading to the more inclusive and perspective format of an EU macro-region.** Several achievements in the specific programmes or projects under the Black Sea Synergy Initiative are worth highlighting in this regard:

- On 1 January 2013, the EU launched **a programme on “Improving Environmental Monitoring in the Black Sea”**. Implemented in the framework of the EU Black Sea Synergy Environmental Partnership, this programme resulted from a European Parliament’s initiative to provide funding for **a pilot project**. The project was meant to serve as a preparatory phase for a larger technical intervention aimed at improving: (i) the availability and quality of data on the chemical and biological status of the Black Sea, and (ii) the countries’ abilities to monitor the marine environment. The overall objective of the project was to set up initiatives that would help improve the protection of the Black Sea environment.
- In 2007, the EU launched **the Cross-Border Cooperation (CBC) Programme for the Black Sea Basin (2007 - 2013)**, which seems to be the most tangible achievement of the Black Sea Synergy Initiative. The Programme supports **three types of cross-border projects**: (i) those encouraging economic and social development; (ii) those pooling resources and competencies for environmental protection and conservation; and (iii) those supporting cultural and educational initiatives. As the Programme’s implementation provided positive results and was appreciated by stakeholders, it has received more funding than initially allocated. The Programme was extended into the current Multiannual Financial Framework under the name Black Sea Basin (BSB) Cooperation Programme 2014 - 2020, which remains part of the EU’s CBC under its European Neighbourhood Instrument (ENI). In January 2017, **a first call for project proposals** was launched under the ENI’s CBC “Black Sea Basin Joint Operational Programme 2014 – 2020, open to proposals relating to all **thematic objectives and priorities**. The ENI grant would be 92% of the eligible costs (Euro 19,6 mln), while national co-financing is required of at least 8% of the costs.

It should be recognized that the EC and the European External Action Service (EEAS) have faced **a very difficult political environment in implementing the Black Sea Synergy**. Russia could have given its full support to this inclusive EU initiative, but instead sometimes adopted a position in the BSEC that was at best neutral. The views of **Turkey**, which aims at establishing itself as a leading regional power, increasingly overlapped with Russia’s attitudes. The EU Member States preferring the Eastern Partnership have not facilitated a Black Sea Synergy progress either. The **main international financial institutions active in the region have also been reluctant to assume risks having to do with this project**.

The EC attempt in 2009 - 2010 to launch **three extra Black Sea Synergy Sector Partnerships** (on environment coordinated by Romania, on energy - by Bulgaria, and on transportation – by Greece) in a short period **turned out overly optimistic**, and the fields selected for the partnerships had quite different levels of political feasibility. In addition, **establishing bridges between the management of three different EU operational policies in the BSR – the BSEC, the Black Sea Synergy and the Eastern Partnerships platform – remains a particular challenge under the centralised EU format of governance**. There is therefore a clear need for introduction of more modern strategies that would address these shortcomings.

The Eastern Partnership and the Black Sea Synergy should advance in parallel, since they overlap substantially. As to policy options for further Black Sea Synergy evolution, the EU could formulate clear objectives and priorities for marking additional progress. The Black Sea “sector partnerships” also need to be developed further. The European Parliament has repeatedly called for a separate budget for the Black Sea, which the EC and the EEAS cannot reason-

ably ignore any longer. All this could easily be achieved under the umbrella of an EU strategy for a BSR macro-region, which offers sophisticated and efficient ways of advancing a more comprehensive set of local cooperation activities.

### c) *Additional EU-Supported Activities*

In addition, The EU is implementing, on multilateral or bilateral basis, a number of other cooperation programmes and projects in the BSR. They could also constitute significant building blocks for the more comprehensive and well-organized concept of a Black Sea Macro Region, with a specific EU strategy, improved coordination between existing policies and initiatives, defined objectives, thematic priorities, sectoral activities and funding options. The current EU-related activities include:

- **The Black Sea Horizon Project (2015 - 2018)** designed to boost scientific and technological collaboration funded by Horizon 2020, the EU Framework Programme for Research and Innovation. The project supports the EU's external relations with BSR countries by: (i) contributing to ongoing bi-regional and regional science, technology and innovation (STI) policy dialogues, and (ii) increasing the knowledge base about the EU's external environment. These activities aim to strengthen the economic competitiveness and to establish favourable conditions by pooling resources and identifying challenging thematic areas for cooperation;
- **An EU Scoping Mission** (assessment through monitoring, consultations and discussions) has been carried out to assess the current state of maritime affairs in the coastal BSR countries and to suggest draft architecture for a project to assist in building up the capacities of public bodies and raising awareness about the benefits of maritime integration. A project concept has been produced, which is under discussion with coastal countries and regional organizations.
- **The Executive Agency for Small and Medium-Sized Enterprises (EASME)** is currently dealing with **eight on-going projects** focused on cross-border maritime issues, blue growth, coastal and cultural tourism, integrated maritime surveillance, and maritime clusters.
- **The Community Research and Development Information Service (CORDIS)** is the EC's primary public repository and portal to disseminate information on all EU-funded research projects and their results in the broadest sense through its website and repository. Currently, there is **one project** focusing on knowledge exchange and academic cultures in the humanities between Europe and the Black Sea Region for the period from the 18-th to the 21-st centuries.
- **The Interreg V-A Romania-Bulgaria Programme** (under the EU cohesion policy) aims to promote a harmonious economic, social and territorial development of border or adjacent areas in the two Member States, and is funded by the European Regional Development Fund.
- **The Interreg - IPA CBC Bulgaria-Turkey Programme** is under the EU strategy for smart, inclusive and sustainable growth, and focuses on environment and sustainable tourism. Cofinanced by the EU Instrument for Pre-accession Assistance II, and by Bulgaria and Turkey, as partners, it covers the areas of Burgas, Yambol, Haskovo, Edirne and Kirklareli.
- **The EU-Georgia association agreement** (from 1 July 2016 onward) enables Georgian citizens to benefit from provision of business opportunities for small- and me-

dium-sized enterprises, improved safety of locally grown agricultural products, and enhanced energy efficiency.

- The **EU-Ukraine association agreement** (yet to enter into force, though some of its parts apply provisionally) establishes political and economic association between the EU, its Member States, EURATOM, and Ukraine. The parties commit themselves to cooperate and converge economic policy, legislation, and regulation across a broad range of areas.

#### d) **Maritime Regional Cooperation**

The Conference of Peripheral Maritime Regions (CPMR) is an independent organization bringing together some 160 regions from 25 states from the European Union and beyond. Representing about 200 million people, the CPMR campaigns promote a more balanced development of the European territory. The conference operates both as a think-tank and as a lobby for the regions involved. Through its extensive network of contacts within the EU institutions and national governments, the CPMR has been targeting its actions to ensure that the needs and interests of its Member Regions are taken into account in policies with high territorial impact. It focuses mainly on social, economic and territorial cohesion, maritime policies, blue growth, and accessibility. European governance, energy, climate change, neighbourhood and development are also targets of its activities.

The Balkan and Black Sea Commission (BBSC) is one of the six Geographical Commissions of the CPMR. It was established in 2004, when two existing commissions for the Balkans and the Black Sea area decided to join forces. Currently, the BBSC brings together members from Bulgaria, Greece, Romania, Albania, Republic of Moldova, Turkey, and Ukraine. The objective of the BBSC is to encourage dialogue in the region and increase stakeholders' awareness and cooperation. The dialogue's focus is on stepping up relations between EU and non-EU regions in the wider Black Sea area. This is meant to contribute towards stability and growth and to foster the presence of the CPMR in this area, thus stimulating collaboration, promoting best practices, and drawing attention to challenges. One of its specific mission objectives is to participate in the shaping, at regional and EU levels, of the macroregional and maritime strategies relevant to the area. These include the Black Sea Synergy, the Strategy for the Danube Region (EUSDR), the Strategy for the Adriatic and Ionian Region (EUSAIR), the Strategy for the Alpine Region (EUSAR), and the Integrated Maritime Policy for the Black Sea.

The Annual High-Level Stakeholder Conference has turned into an important forum for engagement with the stakeholder community in the Black Sea. Building on the success of the high-level conferences held in Bucharest (2014), Sofia (2015) and most recently in Odesa (2016), the EC teams up every year with maritime practitioners and entrepreneurs of the region to discuss how they can achieve their maximum potential, and generate sustainable economic and social benefits in coastal areas.

#### e) **Cooperation at NGO Level**

The Romanian Non-Governmental Development Organization (NGDO) Platform – FOND held the IXth edition of the Black Sea NGO Forum from 31 October to 2 November 2016 in Varna, Bulgaria. This forum aimed to enhance the level of dialogue and cooperation among NGOs in the wider Black Sea Region, to strengthen the NGOs capacity to influence regional and national policies, and to increase the number and quality of regional partnerships and projects. The "2016 edition" was organized with the financial support of the EC and the Romanian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and in partnership with the UNDP's Regional Centre for Europe and Central Asia, the Civil Society Organizations (CSO) Partnership for Development Effectiveness

(CPDE), and with support from the local partner, the Black Sea NGO Network (BSNN). It targeted the implementation of the “Strategic Framework for Civil Society Cooperation in the Black Sea Region” by promoting an enabling environment for CSOs as a prerequisite for regional cooperation and supporting the Black Sea NGO Forum’s Working Groups engaged in the thematic cooperation areas identified by participants during the “2015 edition”.

An open-ended list of specific programmes, projects, sectoral and other EU-related activities, both under and outside the Black Sea Synergy Initiative, is provided in **a separate Information Note entitled “Cooperation Projects in the BSR”**, which serves as **a technical supplement to this discussion paper**.

### 3. The Security Challenge

#### a) *The Growing Military Confrontation in the BSR*

Military deployments by Russia, including forward-based nuclear forces, in western Russian territories and Crimea, and the creation of a NATO “rapid reaction force” with an intensive schedule of military exercises in Poland, the three Baltic countries, Romania, Bulgaria and the Black Sea waters, are perceived as having increased the risk of a major military confrontation in the BSR. Moscow describes these developments within NATO as open adversarial acts of “military encirclement” threatening Russian borders. The possibility for open military hostilities or even a war sparked by an accidental naval or land military confrontation in the BSR may not be ignored.

Coordinated actions of the BSR countries are urgently required to change the trend of potentially confrontational postures and to minimize the danger of military escalation. This is a common challenge for the entire BSR. Strengthening economic, trade, and confidencebuilding cooperation in the BSR, involving EU, NATO Member States, and Russia, can and should be developed as an effective way to enhance security and stability in the region. Typical EU “soft power” approaches to reinforce the foundations of peace in Europe, including the BSR, seem essential in this respect. They could be **based on the strategy of building up mutual understanding and economic inter-dependence between past or potential adversaries, which would then serve as a longterm foundation for peace and stability** (for example, the rapprochement between Germany and France after WW2). In the 21-th century, it should be possible to project into the BSR the success of this historic initiative, which has brought about stable peace and prosperity in Western Europe and has been fundamental for the establishment of the EU.

#### b) *The Black Sea Region in the Broader European Security Landscape*

The return to a “Cold War” terminology has damaged the entire spectrum of international relations as applied to the European security landscape. Deeply rooted political divergences and new dividing lines in Europe, including the BSR, often result from the quest of people to adapt to EU democratic values and to integrate their societies with the more prosperous parts of Europe. Resurgent extreme ideological and religious beliefs, combined with related acts of terrorism, have become an all-European and global concern. Adversarial developments in the BSR, which are related to some of the protracted bilateral conflicts, cannot be isolated from the broader security landscape in Europe.

In some respects, however, the threats faced by most of the BSR countries are perceived as less alarming, and even of a different nature, compared to the threat perceptions generated in relation to the three Baltic countries and Poland. From such a perspective, some observers consider Bulgaria and Greece as the least militarily threatened, due to their close historical, cultural, and economic ties with Russia. On the other hand, as countries located at the exter-

nal EU border, Bulgaria and Greece seem the most directly affected by yet another imminent threat -the surge of war refugees and illegal migration from the Middle East, Africa and Asia towards Central and Western Europe. Hence, the intensity and focus of the prevailing threats to national security of NATO allies in the BSR have a somewhat different flavour and intensity than those voiced in Northern Europe. Balanced collective measures to arrest the confrontational trends and restore the climate of regional peace and stability may therefore differ in these European areas bordering Russia. This promises a lot for the chances of success to the regional cooperation in the BSR, including a future EU macro-regional strategy.

Still, local governments are likely to continue to find it difficult to ignore great power geo-strategic rivalry, particularly between Russia and the USA. Many of them face the common challenge of how best to balance and adapt divergent political and economic strategies to out-of-the-area factors.

### ***c) Challenges to European Security from BSR Conflicts***

After the disintegration of the Soviet Union in 1991, a number of conflicts took place in some of the "post-Soviet" states, usually where the new international borders did not match the ethnic affiliations of local populations. These conflicts have largely remained "frozen"/"protracted", with disputed areas under the control of entities other than the countries to which they are internationally recognized as belonging and which consider those areas as part of their own territory. All of them are situated in the BSR and, as such, are strongly influenced by the geopolitical rivalries in the area. Apart from remaining latent sources of political tension and resumed military hostilities, the protracted BSR conflicts have determined the need for NATO Member States and Russia to adapt existing confidence and security-building measures (CSBMs) to new realities. This process has led to the adoption of the 2011 Vienna Document composed of politically binding CSBMs designed to increase openness and transparency vis-à-vis military activities inside the OSCE's zone of application.

The 2011 Vienna Document is part of an interlocking web of mutually enforcing agreements, including the Treaty on Conventional Armed Forces in Europe (CFE Treaty) and the Open Skies Treaty. However, the selective implementation of those acts of "soft" and "hard" international law have eroded the positive contributions of these arms control instruments to peace and regional stability. Largely, this was due to substantial political developments in the countries of Eastern Europe after the demise of the Soviet Union, coupled with significant changes in the initial military configuration in Europe. More specifically, both sides have disrespected the 1997 Founding Act on Mutual Relations, Cooperation and Security between NATO and Russia, which banned the permanent deployment of new forces in Central and Eastern Europe. The agreement also expressed the understanding that "NATO and Russia do not consider each other as adversaries", which seems forgotten these days.

These arms control and disengagement agreements still constitute a rich conceptual basis for further adaption or development, if necessary, of additional specific CSBMs within an EU macro-regional strategy in the BSR. They could involve land and naval military activities, thus recreating the necessary climate of prudent disengagement and greater transparency among the participating BSR countries. Such CSBMs tailor-made for the BSR situation could, inter alia, become part of a new OSCE process in the future covering large parts of NATO countries bordering western and southern parts of Russia. This wider political process tentatively called "Helsinki-2" is already informally discussed at various scientific fora.



## 4. Developing an European Black Sea MRS

### a) *An Idea With History*

In a 2011 resolution, **the European Parliament** addressed the idea of setting up of a Strategy for the Black Sea Region in the framework of the EU's Foreign and Security Policy. The resolution **called "on the EC and the EEAS to draw up a strategy for the Black Sea Region in parallel with the review of the European Neighbourhood Policy"**. This requirement defines an integrated and comprehensive approach for the EU to address the common challenges to and the opportunities for the BSR, with a detailed action plan, clear objectives, flagship initiatives and benchmarks. The European Parliament believed that "the strategy will make for effective coordination of activities and division of tasks."

### b) *The Notion of Macro-Regional Strategy*

An EU "**macro-regional strategy**" means an integrated conceptual framework endorsed by the Council, which may be supported by EU structural and investment funds, to address common challenges to several Member States and third countries (i.e. non-EU countries) in a defined geographical area, which thereby benefit from enhanced cooperation contributing to greater economic, social and territorial cohesion. The "**sea basin strategy**" is a similar concept relating to a structured framework of cooperation developed by EU institutions, Member States, their regions and, where appropriate, third countries sharing a sea basin, taking into account the geographic, climatic, economic and political specificities of the sea basin.

An EP resolution of 3 July 2012 on the evolution of macro-regional strategies: (i) endorsed the macroregional approach to territorial cooperation policies between territories belonging to maritime areas, mountain ranges or river basins; (ii) expressed its belief that macroregional strategies opened a new chapter in European territorial cooperation by applying a bottom-up approach and spreading cooperation to more and more areas via the better use of available resources; and (iii) recommended that, in view of their clear European-added value, macroregional strategies should receive more attention in the framework of European territorial cooperation". These provisions fully apply to the idea of an EU macro-region in the BSR, which could develop gradually in a post2020 perspective.

Currently, the EU is implementing four macro-regional strategies: for the Baltic Sea Region initiated in 2009, the Danube Region in 2011, the Adriatic-Ionian Region in 2014, and the Alpine Region in 2016. Involving 19 EU Member States and 8 non-EU countries, these macro-regional strategies have now become an integral part of the EU policy framework. Their objectives are fully in line with EU political priorities; they reinforce synergies between different EU policies and instruments; and they are anchored in the cohesion policy framework. These strategies operate with **no additional EU funds, no new institutions, and no new legislation**, which is a general principle for any EU macroregion. This requires more coherence between existing EU funds, structures and policies, and proactive regional quest for additional resources. The strategies have created working structures around priority areas, selected in a bottom-up process of consultation, under the political leadership of interested countries, regions or organizations(stakeholders), supported by the EC as a facilitator acting in good-faith.

The **key ingredients of the EU macro-regional approach** are: (i) the main actors (i.e. the EU and its Member States taking decisions); (ii) the identification of needs to address shared concerns/ challenges and joint objectives (i.e. agenda setting and priorities, based on measurable needs and political preferences); and (iii) the strategy as a framework for coordinating policies and use of common resources.

There are various similarities between the “macro-regional” strategy and the “sea basin” strategy, which are particularly evident in the case of the Black Sea Region covering both land territories and maritime areas. The two concepts: (i) are place-based, relating to both EU Member States and non-EU countries located in the same geographical area; (ii) focus on common issues, solutions and actions of strategic relevance, providing genuine added-value for the entire region; (iii) encourage strategic cooperation and coordination among policies, institutions and funding sources, where cooperation is brought to a new level necessitating new openings and approaches; (iv) require an integrated approach for implementation, establishing cross-sectoral cooperation and coordination mechanisms, as well as multi-stakeholder dialogue; (v) are supported by all means of funding, e.g. EU, national, regional, private and international funds; and (vi) are placed into the EU legal structure under the regulatory framework for European Structural and Investment Funds for 2014 - 2020.

There are several ***elements of a pragmatic rationale*** for the introduction and implementation of EU macro-regional strategies, as listed below, which are particularly applicable to the BSR. This justifies a process of gradual transformation of existing traditional patterns of regional cooperation into a newly developed, integrated system of decentralized planning and enhanced coordination of local activities from the “2030 European perspective”.

**Firstly**, the macroregional practical experience accumulated so far in Europe indicates itself that ***such a transformations could become one of the basic requirements for more efficient and results oriented functioning of cooperation activities***. While centralized EU institutions will continue to play indispensable guiding roles in developing strategies and in funding regional cooperation in Europe, they can hardly manage to identify, or act directly to address, the specific regional challenges faced by interested stakeholders. Shared local threats, social and economic instabilities, and other existential concerns, may not be governed efficiently from a distance either (e.g. from Brussels). The quest for greater efficiency and ability to arrive at pragmatic local solutions needs, however, to remain or be made consistent, as appropriate, with key EU sectoral strategies and policies.

**Secondly**, established regional interactions often need to cover shared concerns more comprehensively and to be all-inclusive with respect to relevant nonEU countries/ stakeholders from the region. Once again, a striking example in the BS Synergy approach of the EU is the limited scope of its sectoral activities in a situation where local governments/stakeholders clearly see a common need to address energy supply and diversification pressures, border controls of illegal migration, climate change controls, confidence- and security-building deficits, etc. In addition, it is incomprehensible that key actors in the BSR are often absent from regional projects, while their constructive involvement is expected to add significant value for peace, prosperity and stability of the entire region. ***From such a perspective, there is a great degree of unutilized synergic potential in the current multilateral formats of BSR cooperation***. An EU-led macroregional evolution of the multilateral cooperation in the region would have to recognize and exploit this synergic potential. It would build upon the principles and modalities of the EU Common Foreign and Security Policy that seek to interact with other regional partners based on the common interests and the shared objectives of promoting peaceful interaction, regional security and sustainable development

**Thirdly**, the EU macro-regional approach make more efficient the EU territorial cooperation platforms, where the application of ***a bottom-up planning and multi-level governance<sup>3</sup> approach adds more value<sup>4</sup> to the established formats of regional cooperation***. For example, an EU macro-regional strategy enables stakeholders - both EU Member States and (non-EU) third countries in the region (e.g. BSR) - to focus on regional thematic priorities, objectives

<sup>3</sup> Ref.: EU Council's Conclusions on the Governance of Macro-Regional Strategies, 9 October 2014, doc. 13374/14

<sup>4</sup> Ref.: EU Council Conclusions on Added Value of Macro-Regional Strategies, General Affairs, Council meeting, Luxembourg, Press Release, 22 October 2013

and sectoral activities, included in an action plan with specific benchmarks. It usually results in a better coordination of funding and more efficient ways of monitoring regional cooperation activities. The holistic integration and synchronization of various cooperation sectors under a single “macroregional umbrella” helps also reduce the number of unnecessary policy documents, thus simplifying EU regulations. Such development makes it easier for local shareholders to expand cooperation and utilize better regional and EU resources. These extra benefits would facilitate the difficult navigation of the future Black Sea macro-region through “changing waters”.

**Fourthly**, macro-regional strategies are an **important innovation in territorial cooperation and cohesion**. However, they are differing in several respects from cross-border and transnational territorial cooperation. One key feature of macro-regional cooperation is its anchoring to integrated, strategic, longer-term-oriented and open-ended frameworks. In addition, they are requested by the Member States and reflect their strong political commitment towards joint achievement of common objectives. The strategies aim at **addressing challenges and opportunities specific to certain geographical area (which are too local to be of direct interest to the whole EU, but on the other hand too broad to be efficiently dealt with at national level) and define a set of shared, long-term objectives agreed by the participating countries**. The objectives vary according to the needs of the macro-region concerned and the prominence is to be given to strategic issues bringing an added value to horizontal EU policies.

**Fifthly**, in the same context, **moving towards a macro-regional mode of multilateral cooperation** helps advance the cohesion process in Europe by gradually eliminating territorial disparities. In this respect, the first EC report<sup>5</sup> on the implementation of EU macro-regional strategies concludes: **“Reducing regional disparities is as much a goal of MRS as is the creation of synergies for growth and employment in the regions concerned**. Macro-regions can help shape an integrated view on the future of the European territory. They can become an important instrument in the pursuit of territorial cohesion across different policy areas, and can inspire similar approaches as the EU Urban Agenda (seeking to improve life quality). They call for closer links between EU policy areas and EU funds. In order to untap their potential to the benefit of European citizens, links between MRS and cohesion policy should be further explored in terms of targeting strategic sectors, coordinating EU policies and instruments.”

In conclusion, a decade ago, the EU put in place its Black Sea Synergy concept as a framework for a coherent approach for development of the BSR. At present, there are a number of sectoral activities covering the Black Sea (e.g. the Blue Growth Economy program under the EU’s maritime policy and the Black Sea Basin format). However, **neither the limited results from the EU Synergy nor the current sectoral approach in the BSR appear to provide the necessary basis for an overarching futureoriented strategy harnessing the significant potential for transforming the Black Sea from an area of rivalry and confrontation into a region of comprehensive and deepening cooperation**. It seems that an EU macroregional strategy for the BSR would have much better chances to achieve this objective.

### c) The Varna Forum 2.0

The Varna Forum 2.0 provides a timely setting for taking up and advancing the idea of a macroregional strategy for the Black Sea Region. Bulgaria and Romania have already demonstrated that they share a strong interest in converting the BSR into an area of dynamic economic growth, social development, and stable peace. The upcoming Presidencies of the Council of the European Union by Bulgaria (in the first half of 2018) and by Romania (a year later) offer an opportunity for them to come up with a joint initiative within the EU. It would promote the idea

<sup>5</sup> Ref.: Report from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and social Committee and the Committee of the Regions on the Implementation of EU Macro-Regional Strategies, SWD(2016) 443, Brussels, 16.12.2016 COM(2016) 805, Section 7 (“The way forward”), Sub-Section “Conclusions”, page 11, doc. 15792/16 + ADD 1;



and outline practical approaches for **a new macro-regional strategy for the Black Sea Region** in line with the general evolution of the EU's 2030 policy horizon.

It is of direct relevance to this unique opening for the BSR that the EC, in its working document of 31 March 2017 on the Blue Growth Strategy, states that **"despite the complex political environment in the Black Sea region, the Commission has sought cooperation with non-EU countries**. It has been sustaining bilateral dialogue on maritime affairs with Turkey and holding meetings with national contact points for maritime affairs from all coastal countries. The focus is on raising awareness about the benefits of maritime integration and encouraging cooperation at regional level in areas of mutual interest. Such an approach is helping to reduce initial skepticism from some countries and laying foundations for further EU maritime engagement in the region. **Against this background and in view of the upcoming EU Council Presidencies of Bulgaria (first half of 2018) and Romania (first half of 2019), the time seems ripe to seek consensus for a common blue economy agenda**. To support that development, the Commission will launch a dedicated assistance mechanism, called "Facility for blue economy development", in 2017".<sup>6</sup>

Furthermore, acting upon the observations and the recommendations made in the 2016 EC report on the implementation of the existing four EU macroregional strategies, **on 25 April 2017, the Council of the EU approved its own conclusions**<sup>7</sup> on this subject-matter, inter alia, including: (a) "Considers that information on good practices which can be transferred from one strategy to another would facilitate the implementation, and calls on the Commission to support and organize the sharing and transfer of such practices, inter alia, in cooperation with the INTERACT programme"; (b) "Calls on participating countries and their regions and the Commission to further integrate macro-regional strategies and EU sectorial policies, and develop synergies among them, thereby improving the implementation of sectorial policies in an integrated way across territories"; (c) "Considers that the Commission should continue to play a leading role in the strategic coordination of key delivery stages of the macro-regional strategies, in partnership with the Member States"; (d) **"Invites the Commission to continue supporting the implementation of macro-regional strategies where this brings added value, in particular in terms of strategic planning, monitoring, evaluation and communication**, while agreeing that monitoring and evaluation processes should involve all relevant stakeholders"; and (e) **"Remains open to examine any commonly agreed and mature initiative of Member States facing the same challenges in a defined geographic area aimed at setting up a new macro-regional strategy"**.

Against this background, the **steps to introduce the EU macro-regional strategy initiative for the BSR and to develop sufficient support among relevant stakeholders** could include the following actions:

- The governments of Bulgaria and Romania should first make the case for development of the new macro-regional strategy before the Council of the EU and Member States, particularly those involved in the Danube macro-regional cooperation process. In doing so, they could point to the need to ensure the best use of EU resources under existing sectoral programmes by utilizing untapped synergies and directing their use towards the achievement of clear and measurable long-term regional goals.
- The government representatives of Bulgaria, Romania and Greece to various EU institutions should also make the case - both bilaterally and under Council formats - before their respective partners at their meetings. They could suggest for inclusion, in the conclusions of upcoming meetings, recommendations for the EC to present

<sup>6</sup> Ref.: Report on the Blue Growth Strategy towards More Sustainable Growth and Jobs in the Blue Economy, EC staff working document on blue growth (2013-2016), 31 March 2017, SWD (2017) 128, Section 4.1.3 "Black Sea", pages 34 – 35.

<sup>7</sup> Ref.: Doc. 8307/17, PRESSE 19 PR CO 19, Outcome of the Council Meeting, 3531-st meeting, General Affairs, Cohesion policy; Luxembourg, 25 April 2017.

a draft document examining the potential for synergies between sectoral programs by means of a strategy for a new generation Black Sea macroregion for sustainable development.

- Sufficient support should be raised, in this context, within the European Parliament (EP), addressing the same constituencies of Members of the European Parliament (MEPs) and generating discussions and recommendations within the relevant committees, in particular the Committee on Regional Development (REGI) of the EP, which is currently chaired by a MEP from Bulgaria.
- The BSEC organization could be further employed as a relevant format for building support from the countries of the Black Sea Region. The same is valid for non-governmental entities such as the Conference of Peripheral and Maritime Regions with its practical experience of cooperation between interested stakeholders.
- In line with established precedents concerning EU macro-regional strategies, the preparatory process would need to lead to an interim decision by the European Council under the 2018 Presidency of the Council of the EU by Bulgaria, and to a concluding resolution during the 2019 Presidency of Romania, with a view to launching the implementation of the new macroregional strategy for the BSR in the beginning of 2020.
- As regards the specific proposal for EU action on this matter, the 2018 Bulgarian Presidency may wish to find a suitable way **to encourage the European Council to agree on the following mandate for an EU macroregion in the BSR**: “The European Council invites the Commission to present a macroregional strategy for the Black Sea Region by June 2020 at the latest. This strategy should, inter alia, help address the challenges and modalities for cooperation related to border controls of illegal migration; protection of environment and climate change controls; energy supply; maritime transportation safety; fishery management coordination; regional confidence- and security-building; and suitable European Eurasian economic interaction. The existing EU Black Sea Synergy framework and the conceptual formats developed by the Black Sea Economic Cooperation process should provide a solid basis for the external aspects of cooperation in the Black Sea Region”.

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## Information Note: Cooperation Projects in the Black Sea Region

(Supplement to the Discussion Facilitation Paper)

### I. Completed Projects

#### A. Cross-Border Cooperation (CBC): „Black Sea Basin 2007 -2013“ Programme”

##### Priority 1: Encouraging economic and social development based on combined resources

#### 1. Black Sea Tradenet (BST) - period 2011 -2012

**Period:** 2011 - 2012

**Participants:** Romania, Bulgaria, Greece, Armenia, Turkey

**Objective:** To contribute to increasing the visibility of Black Sea Basin (BSB) and the venture investments by bringing together investors willing to start up new intra-regional business co-operation, and building the institutional capacity of business support organizations

#### 2. Industrial Symbiosis Network for Environment Protection and Sustainable Development in Black Sea Basin (SymNet)

**Period:** July 2011 - July 2013

**Participants:** Bulgaria, Moldova, Romania, Turkey

**Objective:** To contribute to reducing the negative impact of production, trading and consumption on natural resources threatened by traditional ways of development approaches, and to optimize the economic development and environmental protection

#### 3. Black Sea Network of Regional Development (BlasNET)

**Period:** September 2011 - September 2013

**Participants:** Bulgaria, Greece, Moldova, Romania, Ukraine

**Objective:** To achieve sustainable economic growth of the regions-partners under the project, to improve the competitiveness of their SMEs and their performance on the international markets, through increasing the potential and international relations of the regional stakeholders, by establishing a network among them.

#### 4. Tradition, Originality, Uniqueness and Richness for an Innovative Strategy for Tourism development in Black Sea Region (TOURIST)

**Period:** November 2011 - July 2013

**Participants:** Bulgaria, Romania

**Objective:** To initiate strategic partnership for supporting sustainable economic development in Black Sea Basin, through valorising, in an integrated manner, tourism potential of the region

#### 5. Black Sea – Solidarity and Economic Activity – BS – SEA

**Period:** January 2011 - April 2013

**Participants:** Bulgaria, Georgia, Greece

**Objective:** To promote economic and social development in border and rural areas of the countries involved based on local resources through Europeanization of business in rural areas, traditional manufacturing and promotion of SMEs and entrepreneurs to access new trade relations and markets

#### **6. OLKAS. From Aegean to the Black Sea. Medieval Ports in the Maritime Routes of the East**

**Period:** January 2012 - January 2014

**Participants:** Bulgaria, Greece, Romania, Turkey, Ukraine

**Objective:** To contribute to filling an important void in the development of cultural tourism in the space covering the Aegean, Black and Caspian Seas by illustrating the economic/touristic/cultural links in the entire area through monuments constituting a wide network of cultural links and interactions

#### **7. Excellence in public sector (Excellence)**

**Period:** June 2013 -December 2014

**Participants:** Armenia, Bulgaria, Greece, Moldova, Romania, Turkey , Ukraine

**Objective:** To increase the administrative capacity of the public sector in the area by promoting the concept of quality systems and the implementation of modern common quality management tools.

#### **8. Danube – Black Sea connection of European and Asian economy, a step for substantial growth of the Black Sea areas (DABS)**

**Period:** May 2013 - June 2015

**Participants:** Bulgaria, Georgia, Greece, Moldova, Romania, Turkey, Ukraine

**Objective:** To contribute to the economic development of the area by supporting better access and economic connections among ports within the Danube-Black Sea area

#### **9. E-Fairs and Trade Networking (e-F+TN)**

**Period:** May 2013 - May 2015

**Participants:** Bulgaria, Georgia, Greece, Moldova, Turkey

**Objective:** To enhance intra-regional and European trade and business links of local enterprises of the Black Sea basin and, therefore, to support local development.

#### **10. Preparing the condition for penetration of the Black Sea wines in the international market (Black Sea WinExports)**

**Period:** May 2013 - May 2015

**Participants:** Bulgaria, Greece, Moldova, Romania, Ukraine

**Objective:** To broaden the cooperation among the targeted regions and facilitate the know-how transfer, with a view to the establishment of a common brand name for the Black Sea wines and a common marketing strategy for significant increase of market shares in wine consumer markets

### 11. Quality Certification System in Agro-tourism (CerTour)

**Period:** May 2013 - May 2015

**Participants:** Armenia, Bulgaria, Georgia, Greece, Moldova, Ukraine

**Objective:** To promote the agro-tourism in the partners' regions and to improve the quality of the services provided by introducing a common specific quality standard and a certification process.

### 12. Cultural Ports from Aegean to the Black Sea (LIMEN)

**Period:** July 2013 - June 2015

**Participants:** Bulgaria, Georgia, Greece, Moldova, Romania, Turkey, Ukraine

**Objective:** To help address a significant gap in the development of cultural tourism in the Black Sea Region by establishing an institution promoting the Black Sea ports and enhancing cultural resources

### 13. Local/Regional Economic Development Network as decisive advantage point for enhanced competitiveness in the Black Sea Basin regions (LRED Net)

**Period:** July 2013 - June 2015

**Participants:** Armenia, Bulgaria, Georgia, Greece, Moldova

**Objective:** To build the local entrepreneurial and administrative capacities to enhance social, informational and other links, thus encouraging national governments to scale-up cooperation opportunities and synergize efforts towards better life in the Black Sea Basin

### 14. Securing Transit Containers (SETRACOM)

**Period:** July 2013 - July 2015

**Participants:** Bulgaria, Greece, Ukraine

**Objective:** To improve the containers' tracking through systematic approach and standardized security procedures enabling the immediate automatic identification and tracking of a sealed container during its transportation between different container terminals.

### 15. Promoting Innovative Rural Tourism in the Black Sea Basin Region (PIRT)

**Period:** November 2013 - May 2015

**Participants:** Armenia, Bulgaria, Georgia, Turkey

**Objective:** To strengthen regional cooperation through promoting economic and social development in the BSB (especially, vulnerable or rural areas) by improved utilization of material

and human resources and by exchange of best practices to enhance product standards and service delivery.

#### **16. Black Sea Network for Sustainable Tourism – Strategies for joint tourism marketing and development in the Black Sea region (BS NTS)**

**Period:** January 2014 - June 2015

**Participants:** Bulgaria, Georgia, Moldova, Turkey, Ukraine

**Objective:** To achieve a stronger regional partnership and cooperation among regions in Black Sea Basin for sustainable tourism management and joint marketing strategy.

#### **17. Tourism Paths of the Black Sea Region (BSB – TOUR)**

**Period:** January 2014 - December 2015

**Participants:** Armenia, Bulgaria, Georgia, Greece, Moldova, Turkey, Ukraine

**Objective:** To establish stronger cooperation among partners' organizations from social, economic and regional perspectives, thus achieving common economic, social and tourism development.

#### **18. Collaborative Networks of Multilevel Actors to advance quality standards for heritage tourism at Cross Border Level (ALECTOR)**

**Period:** January 2014 - December 2015

**Participants:** Bulgaria, Georgia, Greece, Moldova, Romania, Turkey, Ukraine

**Objective:** To invest in human capital and innovation in an effort to achieve stronger regional partnerships and cooperation in the Black Sea Region, fully realize the socioeconomic potential of heritage resources in the Black Sea Basin and establish a unified quality system for the development of cross-border tourism products and common service standards with acknowledged market value.

#### **19. Development of Outdoor Adventure Tourism network in Black Sea Region (DOOA)**

**Period:** March 2014 - March 2015

**Participants:** Bulgaria, Georgia, Moldova, Romania, Turkey

**Objective:** To contribute to sustainable economic and social development in the Black Sea Region by valuating its natural, historical and cultural richness and strengthening management capacity

**Priority 2:** *Pooling resources and competencies for environmental protection and conservation*

- 1. Development of a common intraregional monitoring system for the environmental protection and preservation of the Black Sea – ECO-SATELLITE**

**Period:** October 2011 - October 2013

**Participants:** Bulgaria, Greece, Romania, Ukraine

**Objective:** To create a common intraregional environmental monitoring system elaborating on the technological assets provided by satellite data and geo-informatics facilities and the transfer of knowledge to the Black Sea stakeholders.

## 2. Interpretative Trails on the Ground – Support to the Management of Natural Protected Areas in the Black Sea Region (Inter Trails)

**Period:** October 2011 - October 2013

**Participants:** Bulgaria, Georgia, Moldova, Romania, Ukraine

**Objective:** To widen the framework of trans-border cooperation in the management of nature protected areas (NPAs) and help improve the regional awareness on the significance of nature assets and sustainable development.

## 3. Strengthening the regional capacity to support the sustainable management of the Black Sea Fisheries (SRCSSMBSF)

**Period:** November 2011 - November 2013

**Participants:** Bulgaria, Romania, Turkey, Ukraine

**Objective:** To help standardize, at regional level and in conformity with the international practice, the methods and tools of sampling, processing, analysing and interpreting information, and the fish stock assessment, in order to obtain competitive and comparable data, and provide scientific support for more efficient, socially responsible & environment friendly marine fishery management

## 4. Raising Public Awareness on Solid Municipal Waste Management in the North-West of the Black Sea Region (Less Waste in the North West)

**Period:** February 2012 - August 2013

**Participants:** Bulgaria, Romania, Moldova

**Objective:** To achieve stronger regional partnerships and cooperation by contributing to “a stronger and more sustainable economic and social development of the regions of the Black Sea Basin”.

## 5. Black Sea Earthquake Safety Net (work) – ESNET

**Period:** March 2012 -March 2014

**Participants:** Bulgaria, Moldova, Romania, Turkey

**Objective:** To contribute to the prevention of natural disasters generated by earthquakes in Black Sea Basin by developing a joint monitoring and intervention concept.

## 6. Black Sea Joint Regional Research Centre for Mitigation and Adaptation to the Global Changes Impact (MAREAS)

**Period:** April 2012 - April 2014



**Participants:** Bulgaria, Georgia, Romania, Turkey, Ukraine

**Objective:** To provide a tool for interaction between the scientific community and the policy makers, thus setting up a framework for initiatives to mitigate global change impact on the Black Sea Region

#### 7. Research and Restoration of the Essential Filters of the Sea – REEFS

**Period:** June 2012 -June 2014

**Participants:** Bulgaria, Romania, Turkey, Ukraine

**Objective:** To strengthen joint knowledge and database needed to address the organic pollution in the maritime ecosystem of the Black Sea Basin, to support policy makers in defining strategies, action plans and internal measures to recover marine resources for sustainable fishery in Black Sea Basin

#### 8. Improvement of the Integrated Coastal Zone Management in the Black Sea Region (ICZM)

**Period:** January 2013 - December 2014

**Participants:** Bulgaria, Moldova, Romania, Turkey, Ukraine

**Objective:** To improve the quality of maritime environment using common innovative methodologies for Integrated Coastal Zone Management plans within the Black Sea region, in order to ensure the economical use of the common natural resources in a sustainable manner.

#### 9. Clean Rivers – Clean Sea! NGOs actions for environmental protection within Black Sea area (CRCS)

**Period:** February 2013 - January 2015

**Participants:** Bulgaria, Georgia, Moldova, Romania, Turkey

**Objective:** To contribute to the effectiveness of measures taken by different stakeholders to address the issue of water pollution as a common challenge in the Black Sea environmental protection

#### 10. Integrated hotspots management and saving the living Black Sea ecosystem (HOT BLACK SEA)

**Period:** March 2013 - February 2015

**Participants:** Bulgaria, Romania, Turkey, Ukraine

**Objective:** To foster cross-border partnership for the development of a harmonised policy and utilization of scientific studies relevant to monitoring and addressing environmental threats in the Black Sea Basin in the field of land-based sources of pollution.

#### 11. A Scientific Network for Earthquake, Landslide and Flood Hazard Prevention (SciNetNatHazPrev)

**Period:** April 2013 - April 2015

**Participants:** Bulgaria, Greece, Moldova, Romania, Turkey, Ukraine



**Objective:** To achieve a strong regional partnership and cooperation by developing a scientific network for reaching scientific consensus to setup strategies and hazard prevention methods

## 12. Integrated Land-use Management Modelling of Black Sea Estuaries (ILMMBSE)

**Period:** May 2013 -May 2015

**Participants:** Bulgaria, Georgia, Ukraine, Turkey

**Objective:** To develop, enhance and evaluate impact assessment and management tools for the sustainable land use of the watershed areas of coastal deltas.

## 13. Innovations in sustainable management and protection of natural areas (4GreenInn)

**Period:** July 2013 - July 2015

**Participants:** Bulgaria, Romania, Ukraine

**Objective:** To achieve a sustainable management of protected natural areas in the Black Sea basin and to generate innovative methods for integrating protected natural areas in the overall strategies for urban and socio-economic development in partnering regions.

## 14. Regional Cooperation for Black Sea River Basins Environment Protection from Agricultural Polluters (REPAIR)

**Period:** August 2013 - May 2015

**Participants:** Bulgaria, Georgia, Moldova, Romania, Turkey

**Objective:** To strengthen the partnership and the cooperation in the region and to work together towards promoting solutions for solving environmental common problems.

## 15. Creation of Interuniversity centre for risk management and assessment for prevent of ecological and technological risk in the Black Sea (IUCRISKMAN)

**Period:** September 2013 - September 2015

**Participants:** Bulgaria, Romania, Ukraine

**Objective:** To achieve a better cooperation for stronger and more sustainable economic and social development of the regions of the Black Sea Basin.

## 16. Continuous improvement strategy for increasing the efficiency of wastewaters treatment facilities in the Black Sea coastal states (CISWastewater)

**Period:** January 2014 - December 2015

**Participants:** Armenia, Bulgaria, Georgia, Greece, Moldova, Romania

**Objective:** To achieve a stronger regional partnership and cooperation to realize significant improvements of the wastewater treatment facilities management in the Black Sea coastal states.

**Priority 3: Supporting cultural and educational initiatives to establish a common cultural environment in the Black Sea Basin**

### 1. **BSUN Joint Master Degree Study Program on the Management of Renewable Energy Sources – ARGOS**

**Period:** June 2011 - June 2013

**Participants:** Bulgaria, Moldova, Romania, Turkey, Ukraine

**Objective:** To address problems related to the adjustment of study programmes to the needs of the sector, to contribute to the exchange of best practices through mobility of students and teachers, to improve cross-cultural skills and attitudes of students for addressing projects with regional relevance, and to generate awareness on regional issues.

### 2. **Black Sea Cultural Animation Programme: Pilot model for mobilizing the common cultural characteristics for creative destination management in the Black Sea Basin**

**Period:** August 2011 - February 2013

**Participants:** Bulgaria, Romania, Armenia, Georgia, Turkey

**Objective:** To promote community partnership for the establishment of a common cultural environment in the Black Sea Basin via mobilizing the local cultural resources and education.

### 3. **Youth Action for Regional Coherence and Cooperation (YARCC)**

**Period:** May 2014 -May 2015

**Participants:** Armenia, Bulgaria, Georgia, Turkey

**Objective:** To contribute to regional partnerships and cooperation towards a common cultural environment, where common values and richness of Europe's cultural diversity are shared and valued.

### 4. **Black Sea – Unity and Diversity in the Roman Antiquity (BSUDRA)**

**Period:** June 2013 - June 2015

**Participants:** Bulgaria, Georgia, Greece, Moldova, Romania, Turkey, Ukraine

**Objective:** To create a network of research, cultural and administrative institutions for a long-term promotion of the scientific and cultural values exchange within the Black Sea Basin, so that the entire cultural heritage from the Roman epoch to be integrated, preserved and joint promoted.

### 5. **Culture Exchange Platform**

**Period:** July 2013 - June 2015

**Participants:** Armenia, Bulgaria, Georgia, Moldova

**Objective:** To enable cross-border exchange of culture by providing an innovative, multilingual IT platform, based on available open source social platform solutions and adapted for culture producers (artists, etc.), culture operators, (museums, festivals, etc.) and other actors of the cultural market.

## 6. Black Sea areal for culture and art (BASACA)

**Period:** July 2013 - January 2015

**Participants:** Bulgaria, Greece, Turkey, Ukraine

**Objective:** The project is aiming to mobilize local resources for creation of a common cultural environment for the Black Sea Basin communities

### B. Horizon 2020

#### 1. EVROGRIDS

<http://www.envirogrids.net/>

#### 2. Cloud Based Vessel Allocation Decision Support System for Vessel Chartering - CLOUD-VAS

<http://www.h2020.org.tr/en/success-story/656>

### C. Interreg<sup>8</sup> V-A Turkey Bulgaria Programme Projects

1	2007CB16IPO008-2009-1-005	"Innovatrans – innovation transfer between people and enterprises for economic prosperity of the region Yambol – Babaeski"	Yambol Chamber of Commerce and Industry
2	2007CB16IPO008-2009-1-006	The Cross-Border Women World	Euroclub Women
3	2007CB16IPO008-2009-1-007	Euro Farmer - Prosperity trough contemporary and modern European agriculture in cross-border region	Babaeski Trade Exchange
4	2007CB16IPO008-2009-1-009	"Gate 2 Tour: Integral development of cultural-historical tourism in Yambol – Strandja – Edirne regions"	Regional Administration – Yambol
5	2007CB16IPO008-2009-1-010	Two differing practices - One joint purpose	Municipal School and Kindergarten Trustees in Bolyarovo municipality
6	2007CB16IPO008-2009-1-012	Friendship across borders for a common European future	Municipality of Stambolovo
7	2007CB16IPO008-2009-1-015	Stimulation of entrepreneurship in the Food and Drink sector of the BG-TR cross border area	Chamber of Commerce and Industry - Burgas
8	2007CB16IPO008-2009-1-016	We are living our common culture	Atakoy Primary Educational School
9	2007CB16IPO008-2009-1-019	Strandja Mountain - To Learn and Protect It Together	Yenice Primary School

10	2007CB16IPO008-2009-1-022	Encouraging the eco-friendly business in the cross-border region Topolograd - Buyukkaristiran)	Topolovgrad Non-Government Organization (CHЦ Тополовград)
11	2007CB16IPO008-2009-1-026	2010 - New start for cross-border heritages' promotion	Union for providing of services to the villages, Kirklareli
12	2007CB16IPO008-2009-1-034	"Regional Bulgarian – Turkish Business Council "Trakiya" – measure for increasing the economic competitiveness of the cross-border region Haskovo - Edirne	Haskovo Chamber of Commerce and Industry
13	2007CB16IPO008-2009-1-039	Cross-Border Tourism Integration	Edirne Chamber of Commerce and Industry
14	2007CB16IPO008-2009-1-041	"Journey through the rich cultural diversity of the border region Yambol-Edirne"	Municipality of Yambol
15	2007CB16IPO008-2009-1-045	Capacity-Building for Border Municipalities about Strategic Planning	Union of Meric Municipalities
16	2007CB16IPO008-2009-1-049	Cover History Without Boundary	Uzunkopru Municipality
17	2007CB16IPO008-2009-1-051	South-Eastern European Network on Balkans-Cross-Border Region Bulgaria-Turkey	National Association of Small and Medium Business (NASMB) - branch Yambol
18	2007CB16IPO008-2009-1-053	"Green Corridors" - promotion of cultural, natural and historical heritage in the border region of Burgas and Kirklareli	Municipality of Burgas
19	2007CB16IPO008-2009-1-054	"Mobile cross border agri-center for innovative practices, sustainable development and risks prevention"	Burgas Chamber of Commerce and Industry
20	2007CB16IPO008-2009-1-057	Common Culture Beyond Boundaries	Vize Municipality
21	2007CB16IPO008-2009-1-064	Straldzha and Suloglu - Cross-Border Traveling	Straldzha Municipality
22	2007CB16IPO008-2009-1-066	Creating of Conditions of Relaxation, Sports and Tourism in Edirne and Elhovo	The Union of Edirne Province Centre and Villages Administration
23	2007CB16IPO008-2009-1-070	Equal employment opportunities	Alliance for regional and civil initiatives
24	2007CB16IPO008-2009-1-071	Cross-Border Euro Market – Chance for Businessmen and Traders	Liad Lüleburgaz Business Company

25	2007CB16IPO008-2009-1-073	Turkey-Bulgaria Cross-Border Cooperation to Improve the Infrastructure of Vocational & Technical Education	Lüleburgaz Technical High School and Industrial Vocational High School
26	2007CB16IPO008-2009-1-076	Strong, Knowing, Intelligent, Labouring and Leading School-fellows	Civic Association "Together for Svilengrad"
27	2007CB16IPO008-2009-1-081	Improved Agriculture Improved Social Links	Municipality of Kircasalih
28	2007CB16IPO008-2009-1-082	Improving Trade Capacity of Uzunköprü and Haskovo Project	Uzunköprü Chamber of Commerce, Edirne
29	2007CB16IPO008-2009-1-084	Teenager Bridges	Uzunköprü Muzaffer Atasay Anatolian High School
30	2007CB16IPO008-2009-1-085	Investments in the promotion of the cultural, historical and natural heritage in the cross-border region	Tundzha Municipality
31	2007CB16IPO008-2009-1-086	Improving Skills Towards Stronger Links	Uzunköprü Union of Milk Producers
32	2007CB16IPO008-2009-1-087	"Turning the cross-border region Bulgaria - Turkey into an attractive tourist destination"	NGO "High tech business incubator" СНЦ "Високотехнологичен бизнес инкубатор"
33	2007CB16IPO008-2009-1-088	Mutual Aid Keeps Energy	Neofit Rilski High-school (Гимназия "Неофит Рилски")
34	2007CB16IPO008-2009-1-089	"Mathematics - Key of Good Neighbourhood"	"Nikola Yonkov Vaptsarov" High School
35	2007CB16IPO008-2009-1-091	Improvement of quality of life in the cross-border region through promotion of environmental friendly agriculture	"Europe and We" Association
36	2007CB16IPO008-2009-1-095	Efficient, Sustainable and Ecological Practices in the Cross-Border Region	Institute for Regional Strategies
37	2007CB16IPO008-2009-1-097	Sustainable agriculture development through capacity building and business promotion tools	Business Centre - Elhovo
38	2007CB16IPO008-2009-1-104	Raising the quality of life in the Municipalities of Bolyarovo and Alpullu and provision of possibilities for recreation and sports"	"Ravnovesie" Association
39	2007CB16IPO008-2009-1-106	Consultancy Network for Business Support and Investment Promotion	Municipality of Mineralni Bani

40	2007CB16IPO008-2009-1-107	"Raising the capacity of border municipalities for provision of social services and application EU policy in the social sphere"	"Demetra" Association
41	2007CB16IPO008-2009-1-110	Cross-Border Youth Culture Programme	

### **"Green Corridors" - promotion of cultural, natural and historical heritage in the border region of Burgas and Kirklareli**

**Product:** A virtual guide through the green corridors network in Burgas and Kirklareli

**Duration:** July 2011- July 2012

**Objective:** To promote the natural, historical and cultural heritage in the target regions. The concept of "green corridors" for developing sustainable mobility and safe access to natural sites, and for connecting the urbanized parts of cities with naturally significant territories, presents an innovative method for sustainable transport to preserve air quality, public health, and the protected areas.

#### **1. Tell US about Thracians**

**Product:** a. Research of monuments and database on the Thracian sites in Turkish territory. (8,6 MB); b. Research of monuments and database on the Thracian sites in Bulgarian territory (5,74 MB)

**Objective:** To achieve sustainable development build upon the key strengths of the Bulgaria-Turkey cross-border co-operation area in order to contribute to European co-operation and integrity for improving life quality by building capacity for sustainable use of cultural resources and historical values

A research study on Thracian culture and sights in the cross border region under the priority axis 2.2: Capacity building for sustainable use of natural resources, cultural and historical values will be done.

#### **2. Capacity building for biodegradable waste management in the cross-border region of Burgas and Kirklareli. (Brochure in Bulgarian ; Brochure in Turkish)**

**Product:** Household Composting Guide (Turkish, 10,5 MB)& (Bulgarian, 14 MB)

#### **3. Initiation of Partnerships for Valorisation of Local Natural Assets and Cultural Heritage**

**Product:** a. Study of key natural resources and cultural heritage in the municipalities of Bolyarovo and Kofçaz (Bulgarian, 15 MB); b. Marketing survey and analysis of tourist attractions in Bolyarovo (Bulgarian, 5,7 MB); and c. Study of the Turkish monuments in the Municipality Bolyarovo.

#### **4. Transboundary Cooperation for Agro-Chemistry and Pest Control Education**

**Product:** Manual & study on sustainable impact of pest (Turkish, 1 MB) & (Bulgarian, 25 MB)

5. **Project: Joint Eco Forces of Small and Medium Enterprises of Cross-Border Region**

**Product:** An on-line tool for environmental self-assessment of SMEs

6. **Stimulation of entrepreneurship in the Food and Drink sector of the BG-TR cross border area**

**Product:** a. Socio-economic analysis and analysis of Food and Drink sector of Bulgaria and Turkey at national and regional level in both countries; and b. Study on market opportunities for business cooperation development in Food and Drink sector in the BG-TR cross-border region and opportunities for SMEs for funding under EU Structural Funds.

7. **Enhancing the Respect for Gender Equality in the Bulgarian Turkish CrossBorder Area**

**Product:** Analysis on the role of women in business life, entrepreneurship and instruments to start up a small business in Bulgaria and Burgas Region (6.7 MB). Research on the EU policy on matters of gender equality and fight against discrimination. Good practices (3.2 MB); Role of women in economic life in Turkey and Kirklareli (3,1 MB)

8. **Cross-border Learning and Education Strategies with Focus on the Use of ICT**

**Product:** a. Research and analysis on the human resources characteristics and the needs of the economic and social sector; b. Strategy for Integrated Regional Human Resources Development (SIRHRD) (Products are accessible under "Resources" Menu

9. **Joint Promotion of Agriculture Waste Composting**

**Product:** Joint action plan for agriculture waste management (AWM) (Bulgarian)

10. **Equal Employment Opportunities**

**Product:** Sociological Survey (3 MB)

11. **Cultural heritage - asset for cross-border cohesion and prosperities**

**Product:** Multiple products on project website (Browse "products" section); Catalogue „Cultural heritage of Haskovo and Kirklareli" (2,5 MB)

12. **Strong, Knowing, Intelligent, Labouring and Leading Schoolfellows**

**Product:** Strategy for youth development & calendar for youth activities in cross-border region

13. **Advanced Quality of life Through Investment activities for improvement of the Cross-border management of floods**

**Product:** Study and evaluation of the risk factors for the environment in the cross-border eco-systems. ; Study Uzunköprü

## 14. Traditional Craft Professions and their Adaptation to the Economy in the Cross-Border Area

**Product:** a. Origin, regulation and development of artisanship in cross-border communities of Burgas region; b. Present condition and possibilities for adaptation of regulated and non-regulated crafts in cross-border Strandzha and some multi-ethnic areas of Burgas region; c. Development process of tradesman and artisan professions in turkey and Kirklareli example European integration & regional competitiveness foundation; d. Development process of tradesman and artisan professions in turkey and Kirklareli example; e. Development and opportunities of the crafts (a, b, c, d, e: 11,3 MB); and f. Handbook about the exchanging of best practices (23 MB)

## 15. Preservation of Cultural and Historical Heritage

**Product:** Movie with natural beauties of the area - Lubimec - Lüleburgaz

### II. Ongoing & New Projects

#### A. Horizon 2020

(Executive Agency for Small and Medium-Sized Enterprises (EASME))

#### 1. Cross-Border Maritime Spatial Plan for the Black Sea - Romania, Bulgaria

<https://ec.europa.eu/easme/en/cross-border-maritime-spatial-plan-black-sea-romania-bulgaria>

**Project abstract:** Supporting the implementation of the EU Directive on Maritime Spatial Planning (MSP); Creating an institutional framework for cross-border maritime spatial planning between Romania and Bulgaria; Developing the cooperation with all states in the Black Sea basin for maritime spatial planning in the Black Sea area; Consolidating the cross-border cooperation and exchange of information between Romania and Bulgaria on issues related to maritime area; Setting out the vision and strategic goals for Black Sea area relevant for maritime spatial planning, while also taking into consideration the land-sea interface; Elaborating the maritime spatial plan for the cross-border area; Contributing to a wider dissemination of all the information gathered on MSP, Black Sea area and best practices to all stakeholders in the Black Sea basin.

**Project duration:** 14/08/2015 -13/08/2017; **Project acronym:** MARSPLAN BS

**Call ID:** EASME/EMFF/2014/1.2.1.5 - MSP projects Baltic, Black and North Seas

**Beneficiaries:** various ministries, governmental department, national institutes, universities, companies working in the maritime and fishery areas

**EU contribution:** 1.639.212,59 EUR

#### 2. Blue Career Centre of Eastern Mediterranean and Black Sea

**Ref.:** <https://ec.europa.eu/easme/en/blue-career-centre-eastern-mediterranean-and-black-sea>

**Project abstract/objectives:** To attract young people and experienced workers and to fill existing skills gaps by supporting activities that will increase employability in key Blue sectors



of the region, e.g. maritime transportation (shipping, ports, ship-repairs and shipbuilding), cruise and nautical tourism, aquaculture and offshore oil and gas.

**Beneficiaries:** Cyprus, Greece, Bulgaria and Romania (Observers: Egypt, Jordan, Lebanon, and Turkey)

**Expected results:** Establish a Blue Career Centre Secretariat in Cyprus with representations in Greece, Bulgaria and Romania; Catalogue the offer of maritime education and training in the East Med (Greece and Cyprus) and Black Sea region (Bulgaria and Romania); Develop re-training schemes for blue professionals to experienced workers in maritime sector, cruise tourism, fishermen and offshore oil, and gas; Mentor & career guide students for Blue sectors in Cyprus, Greece, Bulgaria, Romania; Re-train blue professionals in the maritime sector (cruise tourism, fish tourism and ichthyotourism and offshore oil and gas sectors); Establish e-learning courses for maritime sector (cruise tourism, for offshore oil and gas sector, for marine aquaculture sector and for fish tourism and ichthyotourism); Share & pool resources, e.g. maritime simulators and a training vessel from the East Med. Area; Organise eight Blue Career Fairs (Days) in the Eastern Mediterranean and Black Sea; Promote the mobility of 30 students and 6 staff within the region; Set up a matching database for maritime professionals in the region to balance the demand and supply of maritime, aquaculture and offshore oil and gas professionals in the region; Establish a Quality Assurance Agency in Cyprus and assist in working towards harmonisation of requirements for maritime professional training, focusing on practice (mostly sea faring).

**Project duration:** 01/03/2017-29/02/2019; Project **acronym:** MENTOR

**Call ID:** EASME/EMFF/2016/1.2.1.2 - Blue Careers in Europe

**Beneficiaries:** Bulgaria, Greece, Cyprus, Romania (universities, institutes, chambers of commerce)

**EU contribution:** 551.810,00€

### 3. Innovative, competitive and integrated tools for sustainable coastal tourism and inclusive Blue Growth in the Mediterranean and Black seas

<https://ec.europa.eu/easme/en/innovative-competitive-and-integrated-tools-sustainable-coastal-tourism-and-inclusive-blue-growth>

**Project abstract/objectives:** To pilot a public-private partnership by inviting cross-sectoral stakeholders across the Mediterranean and Black Sea Basins; to promote and facilitate use of artificial reefs as effective and affordable tools to boost innovative and sustainable coastal and maritime tourism, while offering inclusive opportunities for transversal Blue Growth compatible activities.

**Project duration:** 01/08/2016 – 31/07/2018; Project **acronym:** Art Reefs

**Call ID:** EASME/EMFF/2015/1.2.1.7 - Projects in the context of the Integrated Maritime Policy in the Black Sea and/or Mediterranean Sea regions

**Beneficiaries:** Bulgaria France, Italy, Spain

**EU contribution:** 167.520,00 EUR

### 4. Integrated Bulgarian Maritime Surveillance

<https://ec.europa.eu/easme/en/integrated-bulgarian-maritime-surveillance>

**Project abstract:** The current information exchange between maritime surveillance authorities in Bulgaria is sub-optimal and leads to efficiency losses, duplication of data collection efforts and unnecessary operational costs. The main reasons are (real or perceived) legal limitations, as well as technical and cultural barriers, which are preventing the desired information exchange.

**Objectives:** To identify needs in operational centers and in surveillance assets for further cross-sectoral information exchange at national level; To define new information services, based on the CISE Data and Service model, which would be set up and provided to other sectors at national level and possibly exchanged with other states; To identify requirements and obstacles of CISE integration and to facilitate the integration of data available in different ICT systems in a single user interface.

**Project duration:** 01/01/2017 31/12/2018; **Project acronym:** InBulMarS;

**Call ID:** EASME/EMFF/2015/1.2.1.5

**Beneficiaries:** Bulgaria (administrations, police, customs, navy, ports, national agencies)

**EU contribution:** 191.056,00 EUR

## 5. Maritime Clusters Network for Blue Growth

<https://ec.europa.eu/easme/en/maritime-clusters-network-blue-growth>

**Project abstract/objectives:** To facilitate, enhance and develop SMEs collaboration and networking among maritime clusters in the Adriatic, Ionian and Black Seas in the following areas:  
a. Exchange of good practices of cluster management and development of business sectors;  
b. Empowering maritime clusters and/or regional centers of competence to become 'blue-innovative'; and  
c. Enhanced networking among relevant cluster stakeholders.

**Expected results:** Common methodology to identify technology features and innovation needs in each maritime cluster, and enhanced & structured cooperation in transnational cluster development

**Project duration:** 01/09/2016 – 31/08/2018; **Project acronym:** Blue NET

**Call ID:** EASME/EMFF/2015/1.2.1.7

**Beneficiaries:** Albania, Bulgaria, Croatia, Cyprus, Italy, Romania

**EU contribution:** 223.237,00 EUR

## 6. Western Black Sea Underwater cultural tourist routes

<https://ec.europa.eu/easme/en/western-black-sea-underwater-cultural-tourist-routes>

**Project abstract:** Scientific underwater research in the Western Black Sea area has until now been performed only occasionally. A consortium of two Research Institutes, one National History and Archaeology Museum and two SME joined efforts for bringing the common values shared within the Western Black Sea underwater heritage into the public awareness. The aim is to redress the lack of coherent transnational tourist package regarding the Western Black Sea Underwater heritage and the lack of knowledge about the Common Underwater Cultural Touristic heritage. The expected new tourist package proposes four transnational tourist routes: three Western Black Sea underwater destinations and one on the shore destination, as follows: Wrecks and Artificial Reefs; Ancient Underwater Trade Route; Natural Heritage Route; Underwater Archaeological Artefacts Inland Route.

**Project duration:** 01/01/2017 – 31/05/2018; **Project acronym:** NIRD

**Call ID:** EASME/EMFF/2015/1.2.1.8 - Thematic Routes on Underwater Cultural Heritage

**Beneficiaries:** Bulgaria, Romania; **EU contribution:** 120,615.00 EUR

## 7. Black Sea Horizon

[http://cordis.europa.eu/project/rcn/194393\\_en.html](http://cordis.europa.eu/project/rcn/194393_en.html);

**Project ID:** 645785

**Funds:** H2020-EU.3.6. - SOCIETAL CHALLENGES - Europe In A Changing World - Inclusive, Innovative And Reflective Societies; Enhanced bi-regional STI cooperation between the EU and the Black Sea Region

**Project duration:** 01/02/2015 – 31/01/2018

## 8. Knowledge Exchange and Academic Cultures in the Humanities: Europe and the Black Sea Region, late 18th – 21st Centuries

[http://cordis.europa.eu/project/rcn/207058\\_en.html](http://cordis.europa.eu/project/rcn/207058_en.html)

**Project duration:** 01/01/2017 – 31/12/2020

### B. Regional Cooperation Funded by ENI

#### 1. Maritime safety, security and marine environmental protection in the Black and Caspian Sea Regions

**Beneficiaries:** Azerbaijan, Georgia, Iran, Kazakhstan, Moldova, Ukraine, Turkey, Turkmenistan  
[ENI 2016/039351/Maritime Safety](#).

#### 2. Action Document for Eastern Partnership Integrated Border Management Flagship Initiative: introduction of an automated intelligent video-control system at road border crossing point Novaya Huta – Novi Yarylovychi at the Belarus-Ukraine frontier

[ENI 2016/038708/IBM/Belarus Ukraine](#)

#### 3. Action Document for ENI East Global Allocation 2016

[ENI 2016/038775/Global Allocation](#)

#### 4. Action Document for Integrating SMEs from the EaP countries into domestic and global value chains

[ENI 2016/039369/Integrating SMEs](#)

#### 5. Action Document for EU4Youth programme

ENI 2016/038772 03879 5/EU4Youth

**6. Action Document for Eastern Partnership Integrated Border Management Flagship Initiative: enhanced integrated border management through joint border control and exchange of information along the Moldovan-Ukraine border**

ENI 2016/039484/IBM/Moldova Ukraine

**C. Interreg V-A Romania-Bulgaria Programme<sup>9</sup>**

- ROBG-1 E-bike Net
- ROBG-2 IntermodalCBCROBG-3 Green Education
- ROBG-4 The path of Clay
- ROBG-5 6 Reasons
- ROBG-6 DARWLOH
- ROBG-7 Danube -I can
- ROBG-8 Heritage for RO-BG Economy
- ROBG-9 ARCHIVE
- ROBG-10 INCOLAB
- ROBG-11 Plums For Junk
- ROBG-12 Impact
- ROBG-13 Culture valorisation
- ROBG-14 Balloon Adventure
- ROBG-15 ARCH 3D
- ROBG-16 LIMES
- ROBG-17 PARC
- ROBG-18 CBC Audio Travel Guide
- ROBG-19 JESTCULT
- ROBG-20 SSN
- ROBG-21 Community Opposition of Disastrous Events
- ROBG-22 INSECTRISK

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<sup>9</sup> The project acronyms in the table are hyperlinked with web-placed description of the specific "Interreg V-A Romania-Bulgaria" activities under each of these projects.

- [ROBG-23 Large Scale RISks](#)
- [ROBG-121 JEROME](#)
- [ROBG-122 Joint initiatives-emergency situations](#)
- [ROBG-123 D-EMERSYS](#)
- [ROBG-125 Partners in Safety](#)
- [ROBG-126 Grade](#)[ROBG-127 L-TeN](#)
- [ROBG-131 UCLM](#)
- [ROBG-133 Route to TEN-T](#)
- [ROBG- 135 ISR](#)
- [ROBG-137 RIMANA](#)
- [ROBG-139 SPOCO](#)
- [ROBG-143 JobEase for women](#)

### III. **INTERACT Progress Review of Existing MR Strategies**

On 2 November 2016, INTERACT <sup>10</sup> issued its publication bringing together, for the first time, expert reviews of the four existing EU macro-regional strategies. These reviews attempt to present the potential of these strategies for the future. The publication entitled “MacroRegional Strategies in Changing Times: EUSBSR, EUSDR, EUSALP and EUSAIR Headed towards the Future” offers information and analyses of the rationale of the EU macro-regional strategies, the current stage of their implementation, and some of the lessons learnt from this experience. The intended purpose of the publication is to: (a) present a selection of the most relevant facts concerning these macro-regional strategies; (b) help stakeholders in one such macro-region familiarize themselves with the strategies of other macro-regions; and (c) assist in facilitating cooperation and peer-to-peer activities between the four EU strategies in the future.

The above INTERACT publication was issued on the occasion of the “Seventh Strategy Forum of the EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region” held on 8 – 9 November 2016 in Stockholm. Sweden and the Nordic Council of Ministers, in cooperation with the Directorate General for Regional and Urban Policy of the European Commission, hosted the event entitled “One Region, One Future - Vision 2030 for the Baltic Sea Region”. EU Commissioner for Regional Policy Corina Crețu, Prime-Minister Stefan Löfven of Sweden, and Prime-Minister Juha Sipilä of Finland (President of the Nordic Council of Ministers at that time) attended the regional conference. Nearly 1000 stakeholders from the eight countries participating in the EUSBSR and representatives from all around the wider Baltic Sea region were also present at the discussions on the future of the EUSBSR macro-region within a 2030 perspective.

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<sup>10</sup> INTERACT is one of the Interreg programmes financed under the European Territorial Cooperation goal of the European Structural and Investment Funds.

## Conclusions

The participants in the Varna Forum 2.0(13 – 14 May 2017) shared the view that it provided a timely and useful platform for “thinking together” on the prospects for development of the Black Sea Region (BSR) as an area of cooperation at times of changing regional and global realities. Discussions covered a broad range of subjects concerning the accumulated experience in the ongoing Black Sea cooperation, the relevance of the region in the context of EU–Eurasia interrelationships, and in light of the evolving international security landscape.

Particular attention was accorded to the idea of initiating work towards establishing the feasibility of an EU macro-regional strategy for the Black Sea Region in view of the successive Presidencies of the EU Council by Bulgaria and Romania in 2018 and 2019, respectively. Participants considered as favourable to this idea the EU Council’s conclusion of 25 April 2017 that the Council “**remains** open to examine any commonly agreed and mature initiative of EU Member States facing the same challenges in a defined geographic area aimed at setting up a new macroregional strategy”.

Participants expressed the view that the experience accumulated over the years by BSR countries, particularly in implementing the EU Synergy Initiative and the Black Sea Economic Cooperation (BSEC) projects, constitutes a useful foundation for upgrading the existing formats of regional cooperation. The concept of an EU macro-region under a strategy specifically developed for the BSR could be regarded as a creative contribution to that end. They also felt that the time has come to proceed from repeated discussions to coordinated and purposeful action for such upgrading, provided it can secure acceptance and support from all relevant regional stakeholders.

As regards the specific proposal for EU action on this matter, the 2018 Bulgarian Presidency may wish to find a suitable way **to encourage the European Council to agree on a mandate for an EU macroregion in the BSR, inviting the Commission to present a macroregional strategy for the Black Sea Region by June 2020** at the latest, comprehensively addressing cooperation related to infrastructure development; tourism and cultural exchange; maritime transportation; fishery management; energy supplies; controlling migration; environmental protection and climate change; regional confidence- and securitybuilding, and suitable European Eurasian economic interaction.

In conclusion, participants shared the view that the second edition of the Varna Forum “Thinking Together” format had again provided a timely platform for action-oriented examination of challenges and opportunities, and should therefore continue to evolve as a welcome venue for successive discussions on the broad range of Black Sea cooperation matters.

\* \* \*



## The Black Sea – European Macro-Region?

*Georgi Pirinski, Member of the European Parliament, Programme Director of the Solidarity Society Foundation, Bulgaria*



The final text of the Varna Forum 2.0's conclusions states that "...the experience accumulated over the years by BSR countries ... constitutes a useful foundation for upgrading the existing formats of regional cooperation. The concept of an EU macro-region under a strategy specifically developed for the BSR could be regarded as a creative contribution to that end." This formulation reflects the two aspects of participants' views expressed in the course of the discussions – on the one hand that there is sufficient ground for up-scaling Black Sea cooperation, while on the other that the project of a BS EU Macro-Region is too problematic.

Those favouring the proposal to take advantage of the upcoming Bulgarian and Romanian Council Presidencies in 2018-2019 for putting this project on the EU agenda referred to the GAC Conclusions of April 24 last regarding the issue of EU macro-regional strategies, namely that the Council: ***"INVITES the Commission to continue supporting the implementation of macroregional strategies where this brings added value, in particular in terms of strategic planning, monitoring, evaluation and communication, while AGREEING that monitoring and evaluation processes should involve all relevant stakeholders; REMAINS open to examine any commonly agreed and mature initiative of Member States facing the same challenges in a defined geographic area aimed at setting up a new macro-regional strategy;"***(emphasis added).

In this light, those supporting going forward with developing a MR Strategy for the Black Sea region highlighted the real added value that such a strategy would bring to a range of existing and evolving policies and practices, such as:

- First, the accumulated regional cooperation experiences at intergovernmental level, such as the 25 years of multilateral regional cooperation within the Black Sea Economic Cooperation format, the implementation so far of the EU Black Sea Synergy and a whole range of additional EU-supported activities;

- Second, the rapidly growing cooperation at the level of regional and local authorities, as well as between NGOs – namely under the Balkan and Black Sea Commission as one of the six Geographical Commissions of the Conference of Peripheral and Maritime Regions and the successive Forums organized by Romanian and Bulgarian NGOs;
- Third, the Blue Growth Strategy of the EU, which is of direct relevance for the Black Sea as well in addressing climate change, poverty and food security through better protection and management of oceans, which over the last several years has been promoted by annual stakeholder conferences bringing together national and local authorities, business and civil society actors with the support of the EU Commission.

Those questioning the timeliness and appropriateness of the BS MRS proposition voiced considerations such as:

- One should not give preference to one possible form of regional Black Sea cooperation, since there exist at least three alternative scenarios (one could infer – Russian, Chinese, Western?);
- Furthermore, these scenarios evidently are based on mutually excluding values and principles and therefore are not compatible with one another;
- Besides, such a major stakeholder as Russia might feel left out and react with a “nyet” rather than a “let’s see” response to any initiative promoting the idea for an MRS for the Black Sea.

The VF 2.0 Conclusions end with the suggestion that “...the 2018 Bulgarian Presidency may wish to find a suitable way **to encourage the European Council to agree on a mandate for an EU macroregion in the BSR, inviting the Commission to present a macroregional strategy for the Black Sea Region by June 2020.**”

Thus, it remains to be seen which route shall prevail – the one favoring the Black Sea developing as a progressing European MacroRegion or rather the one maintaining the present state of the region as a “European backwater”.

## Summary

*Valentin Radomirski, CEO, Economics and international Relations Institute*



The broad theme of the Thinking Together Varna Forum 2.0 was “THE BLACK SEA - CONFRONTATION OR COOPERATION?”. The discussions were organized around three panel themes concentrating the alternatives for the Black Sea as:

- an European Backwater or an European Macro Region;
- a Borderline or a Bridge for the European Union, and
- a Minefield or a Pillar in the Evolving European Security Landscape.

Some of the main points made in the course of the discussions could be summarized as follows:

### **1. On the Black Sea as a European backwater or a European macro-region**

The participants in the Varna Forum 2.0 shared the view that it provided a timely and useful platform for “thinking together” on the prospects for development of the Black Sea Region (BSR) as an area of cooperation at times of changing regional and global realities. Discussions covered a broad range of topics with regard to the accumulated experience in the on-going Black Sea cooperation, the relevance of the region in the context of EU–Eurasia interrelationships, and in the light of an evolving international security landscape.

- The representatives of the BSR countries members of the EU stressed that in the European Union challenges were best overcome by working with each other, not against each other, and that this spirit was encoded in the very DNA of the European project;
- It was highlighted that difficulties arose from the perception that we lived in a multipolar world, with the one real superpower apparently losing influence and, at the same time, being challenged by other key players like China, Russia and other regional powers, all of which aspire to assume greater roles;
- One participant believed that the international situation was “confusing and confused” so when focusing on the wider Black Sea region it was unfortunate that it again seemed to be one of the focal points of tension and conflict, with very weak

expectations that we could perceive some ray of hope for compromise and detente in the near future;

- It was pointed out that this situation could be overcome by advancing new ideas helping create jobs, facilitating investment, and countering instability by bringing additional opportunities for regional cooperation. As detailed by one of the introductory speakers: “a shared, regional blue economy strategy will send a strong message to investors” and “it will show them that the Black Sea region is open for business”;
- Most of the participants accorded particular attention to the idea of initiating actions towards establishing the feasibility of an EU macro-regional strategy for the Black Sea Region in view of the successive EU Council Presidencies of Bulgaria and Romania in 2018 and 2019, respectively. Many stressed the favourable impact of the EU Council’s conclusion of 25 April 2017 that the Council “remains open to examine any commonly agreed and mature initiative of EU Member States facing the same challenges in a defined geographic area aimed at setting up a new macro regional strategy” for future actions in that direction;
- Several statements emphasised the need for major “user-friendly” projects in the BSR, overcoming the “competing projects of China, Russia and EU”. The cybersecurity cooperation was put forward as an example. Smart Specialization Strategies (S3) were proposed as a helpful tool for wider job possibilities;
- Concluding remarks underscored that the lack of sense of ownership/belonging was an additional unfavourable factor for developing more active regional links; the EU should adopt a long-term strategic approach in the BSR; and the countries from the region should promote more strongly regional cooperation ideas.

## 2. On BSR as a Borderline or a Bridge for the European Union

Participants expressed the view that the experience accumulated over the years by BSR countries, particularly in implementing the EU Synergy Initiative and the Black Sea Economic Cooperation (BSEC) projects, constituted a useful foundation for upgrading the existing formats of regional cooperation. The Black Sea Region was generally considered as a lab for the processes in Europe, and between Europe and the East.

- The concept of an EU macro-region under a strategy, specifically developed for the BSR could be regarded as a creative contribution to that end. Several statements argued strongly that the time had come to proceed from repeated discussions to coordinated and purposeful action for such upgrading, provided that it could secure acceptance and support from all relevant regional stakeholders.
- A need for “network of managing authorities” and “alternative funding” was emphasized in some interventions. The overarching priority now is to tap the vast potential of the region, in terms of both social and economic development, in particular through the promotion of trans-boundary cooperation. Energy supplies and energy security brought new strategic importance to the area in view of recent geopolitical developments in the Black Sea region and the Middle East.
- Some participants shared the view that the stalled process of EU enlargement in the Western Balkans had a negative overall effect not only in the Western Balkans but

also on the wider BSR, and that the enlargement strategy had to be reinvigorated.

- Some interventions expressed the view that the 'Danube River Strategy' could serve as a very helpful example and as a potential partner in an EU macro-region specifically developed for the BSR.
- The discussions showed that the forthcoming Presidencies of the Council of the EU by Bulgaria and Romania were expected to present an important opportunity to add focus on the Black Sea not only from the perspective of the Western engagement, but also to propose more flexible frameworks for cooperation with all the littoral countries.
- Special attention was paid to the overall feasibility of the project and whether in fact Russia and Turkey themselves would be really interested in implementing such a project. A question was raised regarding the need to present the ideas of the Varna Forum 2.0 conference to both regional superpowers – Russia and Turkey - in a manner that would overcome potential suspicions that the EU was proposing a bridge and was simultaneously enforcing a borderline.
- A wide-open support was expressed to the suggestion that a letter could be sent by the conference to the European Commission, which would summarize the ideas and the proposals of the Varna Forum 2.0.

### 3. On BSR as a Minefield or a Pillar in the Evolving European Security Landscape

Most participants shared the view that a completely new perception of the Black Sea Region had developed in different countries during the last 20 years, representing a huge breakthrough for Europe after 1989 -1991, when there were both optimism and energy for change, but that it was gone at present.

- At the same time, it was emphasized that the EU was in a fluid state after Brexit and still reviving from the last economic crisis; the anti-establishment populist parties were gradually gaining approval; and there was a certain novelty – the renewed interest in the unfinished EU work involving the Balkans. As one representative shrewdly noted “there is a perfume of war on the Balkans (not one, but even few potential conflicts)”.
- Instead of being a confrontation and rivalry field, energy could be made part of the positive agenda between the EU and Russia, based on common interests and inclusive approaches.
- Other interventions highlighted the continuing critical situation in the South Caucasus, stating that the region was now virtually “shattered” with the prospect for deepening of the new dividing lines. It would be possible to reverse these developments only if the EU came forward with new ideas and a new impetus for practical benefits.
- As regards the specific proposal for EU action on this matter, the 2018 Bulgarian Presidency and the 2019 Romanian Presidency may wish to find a suitable way to encourage the European Council to agree on a mandate for an EU macro region in the BSR, inviting the European Commission to present a macro regional strategy for the Black Sea Region by June 2020 at the latest, comprehensively addressing coopera-

tion related to infrastructure development; tourism and cultural exchange; maritime transportation; fishery management; energy supplies; controlling migration; environmental protection and climate change; regional confidence- and security-building, and suitable European-Eurasian economic interaction.

In conclusion, participants shared the view that the second edition of the Varna Forum - operating in a “thinking together” format - had again provided a timely platform for action-oriented examination of challenges and opportunities, and should therefore continue to evolve as a welcome venue for successive discussions on the broad range of Black Sea cooperation matters.

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## Programme

Friday, May 12, 2017	
Afternoon	Arrival of participants/ Registration/ Check in
20.00-22.30	Dinner
Saturday, May 13, 2017	
09.00-09.20	<p>Opening Remarks by</p> <p><b>Regine Schubert</b>, Director, FES-Bulgaria</p> <p><b>Georgi Pirinski</b>, MEP, Programme Director, SSF, Bulgaria</p> <p><b>Lyubomir Kyuchukov</b>, Director, EIRI, Bulgaria</p>
Introductory Keynote Statements:	
09.20-10.20	<p><b>Michael Christides</b>, Secretary-General, BSEC</p> <p><b>Karmenu Vella</b>, European Environment Commissioner (video message)</p>
10.20-10.50	Coffee break
First Discussion Round: <b>The Black Sea – a European Backwater or a European MacroRegion?</b>	
10.50-12.20	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The present state of cooperation in the Black Sea region – the Black Sea Synergy; EU supported programs; BSEC – driven; other- in the light of the 2030 Sustainable Development Goals perspective;</li> <li>• The EU Macro Regional Strategies approach to European territorial cooperation – present state and post-2020 prospects;</li> <li>• The possibilities for launching a new European Black Sea Macro Region under the successive Bulgarian and Romanian Presidencies of the Council of the EU.</li> </ul> <p><b>Panelists:</b> <b>Kristian Vigenin</b>, MP, Europe Affairs Commission, Bulgaria</p> <p><b>Svetoslav Stoyanov</b>, EC, Policy Officer, DG MARE</p> <p><b>Stavros Kalognomos</b>, Policy Officer, CPMR</p> <p><b>Moderator:</b> <b>Maria Grapini</b>, MEP, Romania</p>

12.30-14.00	Lunch
Second Discussion Round: <b>The Black Sea - Borderline or Bridge for the European Union - Eurasian Economic Union Interaction</b>	
14.00-15.30	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The dawning new post-neoliberal globalization era and the emergence of transcontinental constellations shaping a new global order;</li> <li>• The one belt one road paradigm as one of the leading forces shaping the trans-European perspective regarding the interaction with Asia;</li> <li>• The Black Sea as a potential key interface for dynamic expansion of comprehensive European - Eurasian interaction.</li> </ul>
	<p><b>Panelists:</b> <i>Tatjana Zdanoka</i>, MEP, Latvia  <i>Nils Schmid</i>, MP, Baden-Württemberg, Germany  <i>Marian Lupu</i>, MP, Moldova</p> <p><b>Moderator:</b> <i>Prof. Neil MacFarlane</i>, Oxford University, UK</p>
	Coffee break
Third Discussion Round: <b>The Black Sea Space - Minefield or Pillar in the Evolving European Security Landscape?</b>	
16.00-17.30	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The growing military build-up and confrontation between NATO and the Russian Federation in and around the Black Sea</li> <li>• The Black Sea in the context of the broader European security landscape</li> <li>• Specific challenges for European security emanating from conflicts in the region</li> </ul> <p><b>Panelists:</b> <i>Sergiu Celac</i>, Senior Adviser, NCSO, Romania  <i>Dr. Reinhard Krumm</i>, Head, ROCPE, Vienna, FES, Germany</p> <p><b>Moderator:</b> <i>Valentin Radomirski</i>, Ambassador, CEO, EIRI, Bulgaria</p>
17.30-18.00	Break
18.00-19.00	General Discussion and Closing Remarks
20.00-22.00	Dinner
<b>Sunday, May 14, 2017</b>	
09.00-11.00	<p>Working Breakfast</p> <p><b>Brainstorming on the development of the Varna Forum as a venue of new thinking on Regional Security in the Balkan – Black Sea MacroRegion</b></p>

## List of participants

Name	Organization/Function
<b>Armenia</b>	
<b>Styopa Safaryan</b>	Founder, Armenian Institute of International and Foreign Affairs
<b>Beniamin Poghosyan</b>	Executive Director, Political Science Association of Armenia
<b>Austria</b>	
<b>Georg Krauchenberg</b>	Managing Director, Institute for the Danube Region
<b>Azerbaijan</b>	
Tural Usubov	Political Officer, Embassy of Azerbaijan to Bulgaria
<b>Zulfiya Alizada</b>	Economic Officer, Embassy of Azerbaijan to Bulgaria
<b>Bulgaria</b>	
<b>Georgi Pirinski</b>	MEP, Programme Director of the Solidarity Society Foundation, Former Foreign Minister
<b>Lyubomir Kyuchukov</b>	Director of the Economics and International Relations Institute, Former Deputy Foreign Minister
<b>Kristian Vigenin</b>	MP, Former Foreign Minister
<b>Ivaylo Kalfin</b>	Special Adviser in the European Commission, Former MEP, Former Foreign Minister
<b>Marusya Lyubcheva</b>	Director, Black Sea Institute Association, Former MEP
<b>Milen Dimitrov</b>	Chair of the Board, Black Sea Institute Association
<b>Petar Kirov</b>	Chief Secretary, Maritime Administration
<b>Valentin Radomirski</b>	Ambassador (ret.), CEO, Economics and International Relations Institute
<b>Radoslav Deyanov</b>	Minister-Plenipotentiary (ret.), Expert (PhD), RAD Consulting, Economics and International Relations Institute
<b>Georgia</b>	
<b>Eka Akobia</b>	Research Fellow, Georgian Foundation for Strategic and International Studies
<b>Germany</b>	
<b>Nils Schmid</b>	Member of the Parliament of BadenWürttemberg, Head of SPD Group, Former Deputy Prime-Minister of BadenWürttemberg
<b>Reihnhard Krumm</b>	Head, Regional Office for Cooperation and Peace in Europe (ROCPE), Vienna, Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung
<b>United Kingdom</b>	
<b>Neil MacFarlane</b>	Professor, Oxford University
<b>Greece</b>	
<b>Dimitrios Triantaphyllou</b>	Director-General, International Centre for Black Sea Studies (ICBSS), Athens; Assistant Professor of International Relations, Kadir Has University, Istanbul
<b>Moldova</b>	
<b>Marian Lupu</b>	Member of Parliament, Former Speaker of Parliament
<b>Andrian Buligari</b>	Adviser in Parliament
<b>Vladislav Kulminski</b>	Executive Director, Institute for Strategic Initiatives
<b>Romania</b>	
<b>Sergiu Celac</b>	Senior Adviser, National Centre for Sustainable Development, Former Foreign Minister
<b>Russia</b>	

<b>Diana Ayyvazyan</b>	Research Associate, Institute of Europe, Russian Academy of Sciences, Moscow
	<b>Turkey</b>
<b>Turabi Kayan</b>	Member of Parliament, Republican People's Party (CHP)
	<b>Ukraine</b>
<b>Sergiy Korsunsky</b>	Ambassador-at-Large
<b>Hanna Shelest</b>	Member of the Board, Foreign Policy Council "Ukrainian Prism"
	<b>European Commission</b>
<b>Svetoslav Stoyanov</b>	Policy Officer, DG MARE
	<b>European Parliament</b>
<b>Maria Grapini</b>	MEP, S&D, Romania
<b>Tatjana Zdanoka</b>	MEP, Greens, Latvia
<b>Yulia Satirova</b>	Parliamentary assistant
	<b>International organizations</b>
<b>Michael Christides</b>	Secretary-General, Organization of the Black Sea Economic Cooperation (BSEC)
<b>Stavros Kalognomos</b>	Policy Officer, Conference of Peripheral Maritime Regions (CPMR)
	<b>Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung</b>
<b>Regine Schubert</b>	Director, Bulgaria Office
<b>Pentcho Houbtchev</b>	Programme Coordinator, Bulgaria Office





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