

<p style="text-align: center;">Synergies between Black Sea and Northern Europe Cooperation: Exchange – Enhance – Elaborate</p>

International Conference, Bucharest, 27 April 2007

Summary

The international conference “**Synergies between Black Sea and Northern Europe Cooperation**” was organised by the Romanian Ministry of Foreign Affairs under the aegis of the Black Sea Forum for Dialogue and Partnership (BSFDP), in Bucharest, on the 27th of April 2007.

The goal of the conference was to commonly assess mechanisms of regional cooperation in Northern Europe and in the Black Sea region respectively, aiming at more synergy and coherence, as well as to foster collaboration between the two regions, in the framework of the European Union and beyond.

The conference had three working sessions. Below you will find a summary of the discussions.

First Session: “Valuing Regional Expertise”

Identifying the fields of excellence in the two areas, sharing lessons of regional cooperation including specific instruments of cooperation

Regional cooperation in the wider Black Sea Region will be substantially consolidated when EU will have a greater involvement in the process. EU can offer institutional instruments and positive leverage in order to help the societies and local economies to cooperate efficiently.

Furthermore, EU involvement can stimulate economic growth and the gradual connection of the area to European processes. The Communication of the European Commission “**Black Sea Synergy - a new initiative for regional cooperation**” gives a new impetus for closer relations between the EU and the Black Sea region.

In Northern Europe there are four intergovernmental commissions for regional cooperation: The Nordic Council of Ministers, The Euro-Arctic Council of Barents Sea, The Council of Baltic Sea States and the Arctic Council.

All these regional councils cover different geographical areas from Northern Europe and have different structures. The new policies of the Nordic Dimension offer the instruments for strengthening synergies between those four regional councils. Under the umbrella of the Nordic Dimension, there are projects and programmes in different fields of interest which were successfully implemented in special areas in Northern Europe. This has facilitated the extension of these projects in a wider area than the region where they were initially realized.

The representative of the Nordic Council pointed out the fact that the Nordic cooperation succeeded because, although there were historical differences and conflicts between the countries, the Nordic States found common solutions for important questions.

The states involved share values and a sense of belonging to the region, which are more important than differences and competition. Nordic Cooperation is based on the principle that one state's policy affects also its neighbours. There is a clear agenda in the Nordic cooperation, but generally the the topics are discussed in a open, flexible way. Nordic Synergy aims to make living and working conditions more attractive in the respective countries, make small countries stronger, increase international impact of the Nordic values and discuss important topics for the international community.

The significant number of existing formats of cooperation in Northern Europe represents a positive characteristic of the region, as the advantage of the programs can be built on this diversity, especially through an efficient division of labour and through cooperation between the existing organisations CBSS, BEAC, AC, NCM. This offers wider opportunities for implementation of the Nordic Dimension politics for the next years.

The representative of the Norwegian Presidency of the Arctic Council showed that the importance of Arctic Council is based on recognising that challenges need to be met through cooperation. The Arctic Council is characterised by a very practical approach: six working groups conduct more than one hundred projects dealing with pollution, health, biodiversity, climate change, oil spill, etc. Continuity in the Arctic Council is ensured through setting common priorities for two chairmanships. The work of the Council is assessed continuously, which favours efficiency and adaptation.

Regional councils from Northern Europe play an important role by implementing and realising concrete activities oriented towards achieving positive results. CBSS welcomes the fact that the partners of the Nordic Dimension (Russia, Iceland and Norway) are supporting this model of partnership and wishes to continue and develop the cooperation between these two existing partnerships of the Nordic Dimension in the future, and also to examine the possibilities of application of the partnership model to other sectors and fields.

International cooperation in the Arctic region was brought in the attention of the international community in the last two years, especially because of the awareness of the climate change threats, with important implications for culture, bio-diversity and economic activity. These problems, such as developing new routes of oil transportation over the Arctic Ocean, bring new challenges, but also create new possibilities. The challenges that the arctic region has to face have in common the fact that they are cross-border issues, so they have to be solved through international cooperation. Cooperation in the Arctic Council brought greater results than each nation could achieve individually, especially in the field of polluting larger areas and in the field of climate change.

Second session: “Cooperation between the European structures and regional initiatives”

The case of the Northern Dimension and the emergence of a Black Sea policy of the EU. Developments within CoE framework

The Secretary General of BSEC pointed out the most important moments defining the relationship between the EU and the Black Sea region, and particularly with BSEC, from the European Commission’s Communication of 1997 until the recent COEST meetings where this subject was discussed.

He considered that Black Sea Synergy is a useful document, very welcomed as first step in this direction. He presented the importance of this year’s BSEC anniversary Summit mainly due to its substance, respectively endorsing the new project-oriented approach, finalising the reform process and launching a new “era” in the EU-BSEC relationship.

The representative of the Chamber of Regions of the Council of Europe's Congress explained the Euro-regions’ importance for consolidating regional cooperation. This could contribute to growing social and economic cohesion and to strengthening cultural connections. Cooperation in the framework of Euro-regions means looking for coherent solutions to solve the local communities’ problems.

The representative of the European Commission (COM) pointed out to the factors that contribute, in general, to increasing the attention given to regional cooperation: globalisation, the rising importance of an actor’s “size” on the international stage, the role of the sub-statal cooperation, the emergence of integration and cooperation processes after the Cold War. The process of cooperation is useful also from the perspective of avoiding the creation of new political dividing lines, as a complementary instrument besides other traditional international contacts. COM assesses regional initiatives through their political value and through their practical, effective results, their concrete added value.

Northern cooperation can be a source of inspiration for the Black Sea region, but significant differences between this two areas have to be taken into consideration. Concrete, technical solutions for the Black Sea can be found, from the Northern model, in the field of financing.

The Black Sea Synergy was elaborated to “fill the gap” between the Northern and Southern Europe. Hence, COM has in the present three policies developed in different contexts, which differ also in their substance, organisation and structure, with different names: “dimension” for North, “partnership” for South, and “synergy” for the Black Sea.

The representative of the EU German Presidency (PRES) explained the process of approaching this issue, including a series of consultations held with the EU member states from the region. EU’s interests in the region are focused on stability and democratisation. If, until now, the Black Sea was not a priority area for the EU, the member states started to be aware of the importance of this region, especially because of

some sensitive aspects like environment, immigration, energy, illegal trafficking etc, which had an immediate impact on the Union. He pointed out that Romania and Bulgaria can be the states promoting this issue among member states, with the support of the EU.

The representative of OECD presented the project of the OECD Development Centre, dedicated to the Black Sea region and Central Asia (Black Sea and Central Asian Economic Outlook - BSECAO), reminding, in this context, the fruitful discussions from the Black Sea Forum for Dialogue and Partnership Summit. The project is aimed at promoting the systematic monitoring of economic performance and underlying policies in the BSEC and Central Asian regions, and facilitating information sharing and evidence-based policy dialogue at international or national level.

Several principles that should be the basis of regional cooperation were mentioned: inclusiveness; flexibility – the freedom of choice regarding actions in which a state gets involved, in parallel with a “positive pressure” exercised by other actors; realism, pragmatism, gradualism, bottom-up approach, inclination for compromise and cooperation, better knowledge and understanding of other actors’ interests.

A very useful tool for facilitating regional cooperation is adopting a thematic dimension, as it offers the possibility to tackle trans-national aspects, starting from the fact that the problems we are facing do not respect physical borders.

Third session: “Bridging the two regions”

Identifying the top mutual priorities (energy, environment, civil security, others) and the potential for North-Black Sea future projects and programmes

The head of the Romanian delegation to the Parliamentary Assembly of BSEC underlined the role of parliamentary cooperation in consolidating the regional mechanisms, underlining its potential to contribute to the creation of an atmosphere of collaboration, trust and stability.

The political director of the Romanian Ministry of Foreign Affairs pointed out the successful manner in which the new member states of the EU, together with Greece, have promoted their interest for Black Sea at the EU level, drawing the attention of the Union in a constructive and coordinated way. He indicated three possibilities of connecting the two regions: the relation with the EU and the financial framework, concrete projects of cooperation (in this context, he made a short presentation concerning the specific projects of regional cooperation promoted by Romania under the aegis of the BSFPD), and the Russian Federation, as a common space of both regions.

The representative of the Russian Federation depicted the process of regional cooperation as a process of “gold mining”. Both suppose meticulously looking for “small precious things” and determination to overcome mistakes. The goal has to remain valuing all the “things found”. The importance of BSEC in the region and the BSEC anniversary Summit were emphasised, as well as other forms of naval and security cooperation. It is important to use the potential of existing instruments in order to increase the efficiency of regional cooperation.

Other aspects of interest:

The environmental protection is, apparently, the least controversial field of action and, therefore, one of the easiest ways of regional cooperation. The region is facing serious challenges from the environmental perspective, problems that could constitute the basis of common projects with the Northern region and also with other basins. The emergence of a comprehensive maritime policy of the EU, addressing five European seas, including the Black Sea and the Baltic Sea, climate change represents also a major issue to be looked at.

The existing partnerships in the framework of the Nordic Dimension (on environment and health), are based on joint financing, by member states and by loans from international financial institutions and banks. Their role is vital for the success of regional cooperation.

Conclusions:

The participants agreed on the need of a practical, sectoral regional cooperation on less controversial and flexible subjects. The regional institutions and structures should be shaped by objectives and priorities and not the other way around. In this context, the political will play a vital role.

Parliamentary diplomacy can have a significant role as well. The participants underlined the need of understanding and recognising the interests of other states beside their own national interests.

The main fields of regional cooperation identified were: environmental protection, civil security and civil emergencies, energy security, democracy, civil society capacity building, the inter-cultural exchange, developing infrastructure etc. A thematic approach offers the possibility to enhance regional cooperation, dealing with common problems by using cross-border instruments.

The role of EU is essential. The active involvement of EU in the region could help in connecting the states in the region to the European principles and values, especially the ones that are not EU members, thus contributing to regional stability and democratisation.

The EU German Presidency and the European Commission initiated an important process, through a coordinated and coherent approach for the Black Sea region. It is essential that, in the upcoming months, the states from the region continue their efforts to value materialise and advance this process.