

Minister Ungureanu,
Excellencies
Ladies and Gentlemen

I am honoured and pleased to be here today, in Bucharest, at the opening Ceremony of this First Summit of the Black Sea Forum for Dialogue and Partnership attended by many eminent personalities representing all the countries of this region and beyond.

I am especially grateful to the President of Romania for offering to all of us this new and very important occasion for promoting further dialogue on the identity and the future of the Black Sea Region, and for strengthening mutual understanding and cooperation in this strategic region.

Italy does support your initiative to create a new, inclusive and transparent process of reflection on the opportunities and challenges of the Black Sea region. We appreciate your view that the Forum will also take into account and complement the regional cooperation mechanisms already in place, with a view to identifying areas where greater efforts are required.

Italy has been, and still is, a traditionally convinced promoter of the dialogue and cooperation among the countries belonging to a same region, as an important avenue for increasing regional security and stability: we strongly supports the Euro-Mediterranean dialogue, the NATO Mediterranean dialogue, the Central European Initiative, the Adriatic-Ionian Initiative and other similar fora. Therefore, we attach great importance to every other effective initiative going in this direction in other regions.

At the same time, drawing on our experience, we know that regional dialogue, in order to be successful and to reach its goals, should offer to all the countries of the region the opportunity to participate to a broad and inclusive regional dialogue, while at the same time, avoid duplicating the work carried out by other already existing regional fora.

If adequately developed, we are confident that the Black Sea Forum will highly contribute to the creation of a positive atmosphere of openness and inclusiveness and will succeed in building on the positive results achieved so far by the already existing regional initiatives, as the Black Sea Economic Cooperation (BSEC) and the “Blackseafort” operation.

The Black Sea Economic Cooperation (BSEC), where Italy enjoys observer status, has already proved to be a valid instrument to promote the economic development in the Black Sea area, namely in the field of energy and transport, but also in other sectors, like the protection of the environment, which, by the way, will be an important topic of this Forum.

We also congratulate all the coastal States of the Black Sea for the ongoing, fruitful cooperation among their fleets taking place under the umbrella of “Blackseafor”: this operation represents a powerful deterrent against terrorism, drug trafficking and smuggling, enhancing, at the same, time maritime cooperation also for humanitarian purposes, such as rescue operations.

Both Europe and the countries of the Black Sea region share a growing number of issues of common interest and concern: consolidating a Black Sea area of predictable, democratic and developed countries, enjoying security and stability, is in the interest of all the countries of the region, but also of all the European countries.

In fact, not only is this region at the crossroads of many routes from Central Asia, including for energy supply and transit, but, it is also placed as a “hinge” between the European space and some of the crisis areas of particular concern for Europe and for the international community.

Italy shares and supports the consequent development, in recent years, by the European Union of a number of different, but all very important, cooperation agreements with the countries of the Black Sea region. Their aims is to support, on the basis of mutual respect and transparency with all the countries of this region, the creation of an area of stability and security; the strengthening of democratic institutions; the support of good neighbourhood policies; the fight against terrorism; and the social and economic development.

In this respect, Italy welcomed the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP), addressed to the EU eastern (and southern) neighbours, as well as the new impetus given to the relationship between the European Union and the Russian Federation, on the occasion of the Summit on the 10th of May 2005.

The enhancement and the enlargement of a favourable economic environment in the entire Black Sea Region, is a subject of major interest for Italy: thousands of small and medium Italian enterprises have already transferred their activities to the Countries of this region, many of them in Romania. This is a clear demonstration of the confidence that the Italian business community has on the present and future potentialities of the whole Black Sea region.

In this perspective, we attach great importance to the completion of the Trans-European corridor n.8 which will link the Albanian city of Durres with the Bulgarian ports of Burgas and Varna, through Tirana and Skopje, as it will strongly reinforce the economic and commercial relations already existing between the countries of the Adriatic regions and those of the Black Sea.

Let me conclude by recalling that not only the ancient Romans, but also the Italian maritime Republics of Genoa and Venice, whose fleets in the Middle Ages moved freely in the Black Sea, looked at seas not as obstacles but, on the contrary, as ways of communication and understanding among peoples.

Sharing a complex history of coexistence, all the countries of the Black Sea region have a further opportunity to foster the culture of cooperation and solidarity in the framework of a new regional forum.

On behalf of my Government, I would like to congratulate the President of Romania, together with all the Romanian Authorities, for the impeccable organization of this Summit to which I wish full success, and for the warm welcome extended to me and to my Delegation.

Thank you very much, Minister Ungureanu.