

**Peter SEMNEBY, EUSR for South Caucasus**

*As delivered*

**Address of H.E. Mr. Peter Semneby, EU Special Representative for the South Caucasus  
at the Summit of the Black Sea Forum for Dialogue and Partnership  
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The Black Sea is a region of increasing importance to the EU. A number of factors have contributed to strengthening the political profile of the region within the EU: Romania and Bulgaria will soon become EU members, and Turkey has started accession talks. Ukraine, Moldova and the South Caucasus are all part of the ENP. The EU has a strategic partnership with Russia. And the increasingly important energy questions are also contributing to the focus on the Black Sea region.

Today, the EU has privileged political relationships with all the countries of the Black Sea. There are different political frameworks with the various countries, but the aim is the same: to create a stable, democratic and prosperous region while keeping the specific challenges of each country in mind.

South Caucasus is the region I deal with on a daily basis. It is interesting to see how much the desire to work closer with the EU has evolved over the last years. There is also a growing identification with the Black Sea region. The wish of the EU to work more closely with the South Caucasus resulted in the region becoming part of the European Neighbourhood Policy in 2004. We are now in the final stages of the negotiations on Action Plans, which will provide a firm basis for working jointly on reform and the particular challenges the individual countries face.

The challenges in order to create conditions for prosperity and security are multifaceted, but some are more urgent than others. These include a resolution of the frozen conflicts, the development of the rule of law and the development of good relations between the countries and their neighbours within a wider regional framework.

The new dynamism in the Black Sea region has led to numerous initiatives from within the region itself and by the wider international community. It is our common task to make sure that all these initiatives complement each other and deliver practical results.

A regional approach by the EU has been used successfully before in other regions. We can draw on the lessons from past experiences to address the challenges of tomorrow. One of the important lessons of the past EU experiences is that the regional approach has to be inclusive. Regional initiatives provide an opportunity to create links with partners outside the EU. For example, the cooperation with Russia has been fruitful in the Baltic Sea context. We should repeat those positive policies and experiences also in the Black Sea region.

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