

**Intervention by H.E. Mr. Antanas Valionis,
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Black Sea Forum for Dialogue and Partnership Summit**

Session: The Wider Black Sea Region in European and Global Context

Bucharest, Romania 5 June 2006

Excellencies,
Distinguished Guests,
Dear Colleagues,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

First of all, let me express my gratitude for the invitation to attend the Black Sea Forum for Dialogue and Partnership Summit. This Forum, uniting so many states and institutions, substantiates an optimistic perspective for the Black Sea "dimension". I would like to congratulate the hosts on their initiative and to thank-you for their hospitality.

The issues to be discussed at this Forum are of paramount importance to the future development of the Black Sea Region. And with that, I am convinced, they will have farther reaching implications on Europe at large. Thus, we have to develop a vision for this part of the continent **together** – a vision which would underpin our strategies and policy actions in the years to come.

There have been attempts in the recent past to delineate the contours of Black Sea cooperation with the West. In the historical speech in Warsaw in 2001, the U.S. President George W. Bush offered a concept of Europe ‘whole and free from the Baltic to the Black Sea’. This concept may have been criticized as ‘going too far’, but it remains unchallenged up to these days. Enlargement, European Neighbourhood Policy, Common Spaces with Russia, just like the many other European initiatives, have all aimed at overcoming divisions and uniting the European continent under one roof.

I believe that the evolving new initiatives, at both regional and European level, will also target the same goal. Lithuania, as an EU and NATO member, will seek that Europe become not a ‘conservation area’ -- a ‘museum of the rich’ -- but rather **an open and dynamic entity** actively participating in global affairs.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

The Black Sea Region’s vision cannot be discussed separately from the broader debate on the future of Europe. Nor can it be limited to the development of the so-called ‘Eastern’, or ‘South-Eastern’, policy of the EU. Whether or not countries like Turkey and Ukraine will become members of the EU and NATO will largely predetermine our own future perspectives.

I do believe that Europe, given its all past experiences and future-oriented creativity, will find internal capacity to transform further, so that no European nation was excluded. Yes, we need **time and patience**, the two things we always lack, to set this process of transformation in motion.

But we also need **confidence**, which we used to have in the past and which now seems melting away, to go ahead and push for a larger and more integrated Europe in the face of growing euroscepticism and domestic difficulties.

If Europe needs time, so the Black Sea nations need action. That action must come from within the region rather than through the EU and NATO-imposed cooperation schemes. We can only applaud the action taken by Georgia and Ukraine, which has resulted in a new-quality partnership of GUAM, based on shared goals and common values. The other Black Sea nations, too, represent a region ‘in action’ through such initiatives like this Forum.

However, compared to the future tasks, the current level of cooperation is still insufficient. The countries of the Black Sea Region have to cope with a wide array of challenges that inhibit their European transformation. Many of those problems lie at home, but some should also be addressed at the regional level and by regional efforts. Let me name just a few of them:

- completion of Romanian and Bulgarian integration into the EU,
- the ‘frozen conflicts’ in Moldova and Georgia,
- reconstruction of dialogue between Armenia and Azerbaijan,
- Turkish-Armenian relationship,
- relations of Turkey with the EU and its member states Greece and Cyprus in particular,
- relations of Ukraine and the other GUAM countries with the EU and with Russia.

Only through solving these long-standing problems together the Black Sea nations will learn how to build trust and confidence among each other. That effort will not be easy, but not impossible. My statement is based on the experience Lithuania and the other Baltic States gained during their transformation. Some our initiatives were implemented without difficulty, like the Baltic Three cooperation and closer engagement with the Nordic states. The other needed more effort to materialize, like our strategic partnership with Poland or Russian transit to Kaliningrad. However, we managed to overcome the divisions and achieve the results.

The Black Sea nations should also start moving out of the limbos which were created in the past and maintained throughout all these years mainly due to the lack of experience to address them in a European way. The situation is changing now. For example, cooperation of Ukraine and Moldova has already unlocked the economic ‘secrets’ of Transnistria. The process must continue down this way until the problem is finally resolved.

Of course the EU and NATO must help where they can. We have to supply political and financial instruments, and even peace-keepers, if there is such a demand. We have to further develop large-scale, comprehensive support mechanisms, like ENP Action Plans or NATO Membership Action Plans.

But the EU and NATO will not replace the lack of dialogue between Black Sea nations. This dialogue has to be promoted in coordination with, but also in parallel to, the European integration processes.

For example, how many students from one Black Sea country study in the universities of the other Black Sea country and vice versa?

How long does it take to go from one capital of the region to the other? And how safe and inexpensive is this trip?

Are we sure that on border the officer will not asked us for another dozen of papers required by the new piece of legislation which, by accident, has been amended recently -- for the third time in year?

These questions spring to my mind when I recall the historical record of the Baltic Sea cooperation. In our case, not all problems existing prior to EU and NATO enlargement have been solved. Part of them is still relevant. But today there is an overwhelming commitment to look for solutions, which gives us the optimism and the incentive to move forward. I believe that such optimism and incentives can also be created here in the Black Sea region.

We could start from a small yet very important step – sharing regional experience and thus building regional identity in the Wider Black Sea Region. It is a proven fact that regional partnerships create synergies that push the boundaries of the possible, thus opening new venues for cooperation and modernization.

Secondly, we have to focus our efforts on building civil societies in the emerging democracies, develop people-to-people contacts and assist in raising a new generation of experts and leaders.

Last, but not least, we have to enhance coordination and cooperation between the EU and America on the Black Sea Agenda. We are no competitors, but partners, when we want to widen the area of stability and security. The sooner we pool our expertise and efforts, the better for the Black Sea Region.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

May I stop here and leave some space for further discussions.

Thank you for your attention.