



CPMR BALKAN AND BLACK SEA COMMISSION (BBSRC) 2009 GENERAL ASSEMBLY MEETING

Thursday, 11 June 2009 (9.30-16.00) - Odessa (UKRAINE)

OPENING STATEMENT BY MR. G. TSIOTRAS, BBSRC PRESIDENT, SECRETARY GENERAL OF CENTRAL MACEDONIA REGION, GREECE

Chairman SERDYUK,
Chairman SKORYK,
CPMR Secretary General GIZARD,
Dear Colleagues,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

We are pleased and honored to have gathered in the hospitable and great city of Odessa, invited by the Odessa Regional State Administration for the General Assembly of the Balkan and Black Sea Regional Commission (BBSRC) of the Conference of Peripheral and Maritime Regions of Europe (CPMR). On behalf of all member regions of the Commission, I would like to thank Chairman SERDYUK for his kind hospitality.

I want to welcome the representatives of the Region of Trabzon, which is applying for membership in our organization. I also welcome the application from the Union of the Bulgarian Black Sea Local Authorities Association (UBBSLA), which is also applying for observer status membership, and all of the representatives from the Ukrainian Maritime Regions, who are present for the first time at a CPMR/BBSRC meeting since their initial introduction to our organization by Mr. Anthony Papadimitriou, BBSRC Executive Secretary, who had the privilege of visiting you last April.

This is our first meeting in Ukraine, and we consider it a very significant one for the future of our Commission. We believe that Ukrainian regions can play a significant role in policy formation and interregional cooperation during this very difficult period for the world, for Europe, and for the wider Black Sea area. I regret that budget restrictions prevented more of our member regions from being present in Odessa today.

We are strongly convinced that Ukraine is an integral part of the United Europe that we are building. The same applies for its regions. For this reason we are looking forward to your active contribution in developing and applying European policies and cross-border, bilateral, and multilateral cooperation in the wider Black Sea area.

A combination of national initiatives and strong regional input are necessary for most of our major areas of cooperation, including the protection of the environment, climate change and conservation, energy, transport, territorial cohesion, regional

development, integrated coastal and maritime policy, innovation and research, tourism, cooperation in social matters, people-to-people policies, culture, and education.

These are the main objectives of CPMR and our BBSR Commission, which, in trying to meet regional challenges in a sustained and coherent manner over the years, has proven to be a valuable partner in bringing regions together to tackle all of these issues in an integrated manner to the benefit of our citizens and all parties concerned.

Our immediate priority is to bring together as many regions as possible from the wider Black Sea area, and we look forward to receiving applications for membership from the Ukrainian Maritime Regions. Our immediate task is to integrate as well the maritime regions of the Russian Federation Rostov and Krasnoyarsk, and regions from Moldova, Georgia, Azerbaijan, and Armenia.

Our eventual participation in the work of specific working groups of the Black Sea Economic Cooperation Organization (BSEC), where we have applied for Sectoral Dialogue Partnership Status, will give us the opportunity to communicate the voice and priorities of the regions, creating synergy and interaction with member states on specific cooperative issues.

Dear Colleagues,

On 7 May 2009 in Prague, the EU Heads of State and Government together with the Leaders of six states—Ukraine, Moldova, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia, and Belarus—launched the new initiative on the Eastern Partnership. This initiative envisions a close cooperation with the six countries neighbouring the EU's eastern borders, based on the principles of market economy, sustainable development and good governance.

Moreover, the Eastern Partnership aims at promoting mobility through visa facilitation. As the Committee of the Regions of the EU has expressed: "partnerships at regional and local level are crucial for Europe's relationship with its Eastern neighbours. The Eastern Partnership should become a project for dialogue between citizens and a platform for cooperation, bringing together local and regional authorities through an approach based on solidarity and on citizens' needs."

We entirely share this view and we believe that the Eastern Partnership and the Black Sea Synergy, both within the framework of the European Neighbourhood Policy, are a first step in the direction of strengthening cooperation in the wider Black Sea area. These policies will be discussed further by distinguished speakers in the first session of our meeting.

After the coffee break, we are going to receive some information on the Black Sea Basin Joint Operational Programme 2007–2013, its strategy, and final information related to the 1st Call for Proposals. This project, which is the first of its kind, and despite its very poor budget, has mobilised several stakeholders in the area. Our Commission, which provided a detailed presentation of the programme during its 1st Technical Committee meeting in Thessaloniki last November, will exercise with the assistance of the CPMR all possible pressure on the EC, aiming to secure a substantial increase in the budget directed to this initiative.

Our session before the beginning of the technical part of our General Assembly will continue with an introduction by Mr. Sotirios VOSDOU, General Secretary of the Region of Ionian Islands (Greece) on the Adriatic-Ionian Initiative, which will involve our member regions from Greece and Croatia with regions coming from the member states of the Adriatic-Ionian Initiative.

Thank you very much for your kind attention.

I would now like to give the floor to our host, Chairman Mykola Serdyuk, and then to Chairman Skoryk for the official opening of the meeting.