



BSEC presentation, work programme and report of activities of the CPMR Balkan & Black Sea Commission (BBSRC) to the CPMR Political Bureau meeting held in Gijón, Asturias on 15-16 February 2010, by Mr Anthony Papadimitriou, BBSRC Executive Secretary

CPMR/BBSRC-BSEC

The Council of Ministers of Foreign Affairs of the Organisation of the Black Sea Economic Organisation (BSEC), at its last meeting in Baku, Az. has approved the application of the CPMR to be granted Sectoral Dialogue Partnership Status with BSEC. The application was submitted on 1 December 2008, following a CPMR decision taken by the 36th General Assembly in Bayonne confirming a relevant decision of the Rhodes BBSRC General Assembly of June 2008. In Bayonne, it was also decided that in the framework of BSEC, the CPMR will be represented by its Balkan and Black Sea Commission (BBSRC)

Please allow me to briefly present the BSEC and the reasons behind our application to you.

The organisation of the Black Sea Economic Cooperation was initiated in 1992 as an informal intergovernmental meeting on Black Sea Economic Cooperation and was converted into an international economic organisation on 1 May 1999, with the coming into force of its Charter signed in Yalta, in June 1998.

The BSEC has its headquarters in Istanbul where its Permanent International Secretariat (PERMIS) is also located and is composed of 12 member states (Albania, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Bulgaria, Georgia, Greece, Moldavia, Romania, the Russian Federation, Serbia, Turkey and the Ukraine).

Observer status in the BSEC is open, upon request, to any state or international organisation which expresses its readiness to make practical and valuable contributions to the work of the BSEC. The following are currently observers:

Egypt, Austria, Belarus, Croatia, the Czech Republic, France, Germany, Israel, Italy, Poland, Slovak Republic, Tunisia, United States of America, International Black Sea Club, Energy Charter Secretariat, Black Sea Commission and the Commission of the European Union.

The BSEC also promotes relationship with third parties (states, international organisations and institutions) interested in cooperating on various matters of mutual concern through Sectoral Dialogue Partnership. The following currently enjoy SDP status:

Hungary, Iran, Jordan, Montenegro, United Kingdom, Black Sea International Ship-owners Association (BINSIA), Black & Azov Seas Ports Association (BASPA), Union of Road Transport Associations in the Black Sea Economic Cooperation Area (BSEC-URTA), Black Sea Region Association of Shipbuilders and Ship Repairers (BRASS), Conference of Peripheral Maritime Regions of Europe (CPMR), the Danube Commission, and the International Network for SMEs (INSME), Regional Commonwealth in the Field of Communications (RCC).

The work of the BSEC is based on procedural rules providing for decision-making with specific types of majority, depending on the subject, although the general view is that efforts are made for BSEC decisions to be taken unanimously.

The organisation's working structure is flexible and includes:

A) The Inter-governmental component, coordinated under a rotating six-month Chairmanship including both ordinary and extraordinary meetings of the Council of Ministers of Foreign Affairs of the BSEC member states, meetings of the Committee of Senior Officials, as well as meetings of its working groups and ad-hoc groups of experts.

B) The Inter-parliamentary component with the BSEC Parliamentary Assembly (PABSEC), the Standing Committee, the Bureau, and individual parliamentary committees as its basic organs. The seat of the International Secretariat of the PABSEC is also in Istanbul.

C) The Business component, which through the BSEC Business Council reflects the importance attributed by the organisation to improving the business environment and extending cooperation across the Black Sea region. The seat of its Secretariat is in Istanbul. We have initiated contacts with the BSEC Business Council in order to find concrete ways of cooperation involving BBSRC member regions with a view to enhancing regional business promotion, cooperation and development across the wider Black Sea area.

D) The Black Sea Trade and Development Bank, which is the organisation's funding mechanism, is based in Thessaloniki.

E) The International Centre for Black Sea Studies (ICBSS), headquartered in Athens, is acknowledged as the organisation's think-tank and covers cooperation between scientific and academic communities of the BSEC member states, the European Union and other similar foundations and organisations.

The Project Development Fund is another valuable tool for developing regional economic cooperation, providing funding opportunities for member state public and private agencies entrusted with carrying out preliminary feasibility studies for development projects. This Fund operates within the framework of the BSEC International Secretariat. Recently, another fund has been established called the BSEC Hellenic Development Fund with a capital of 2 million Euros for a four year period (2008-2011) aimed at supporting small development projects in the wider Black Sea area, mainly in the areas of transport, renewable sources of energy, environment, business cooperation, facilitation of trade, tourism and culture.

Inter-governmental cooperation within the BSEC focuses principally on the fields of energy, transport (with a Steering Committee on the development of the Black Sea Ring Highway and an ad-hoc working group on the development of the Motorways of the Sea), communications, trade and economic development, banking and finance, institutional renewal and good governance, combating organised crime, environmental protection, agriculture, cooperation in healthcare issues, emergency assistance, research and development, education, tourism, culture, facilitating the transport of goods and customs procedures, exchange of statistical data and the promotion of SMEs.

Relations between the BSEC and the European Union:

The Black Sea Synergy - the Regional Cooperation Initiative of the European Commission forms the basis for EU-BSEC cooperation. The granting of observer status to the European Commission is another important step in favour of further cooperation between the two organisations. The strengthening of the institutional relationship was also substantially reaffirmed with the Council of BSEC and EU Ministers of Foreign Affairs (Kyiv, 14/2/2008) on the implementation of the abovementioned initiative on EU-Black Sea regional cooperation. The Foreign Ministers issued a joint communiqué expressing their will to promote closer cooperation between their countries on a number of priority areas such as developing transport and energy infrastructure, environmental protection through the creation of sectoral partnerships, whilst recognising the BSECs important role. Furthermore, the previous special council of BSEC Foreign Ministers (Kyiv, 14/2/2008)

adopted a Statement of Foreign Ministers of BSEC Member-States on a reinforced BSEC-EU relationship.

The BBSRC's decision to apply for **Sectoral Dialogue Partnership** status derived from the fact that BSEC, by being the most credible and comprehensive regional inter-governmental organisation in the area brings together all states of the wider Black Sea area and deals with several issues and policies which are of concern and directly affect our member regions.

More specifically, the main reasons for which the CPMR/BBSRC has applied for Sectoral Dialogue Partnership status with BSEC are the following:

1. To give the opportunity to our member regional authorities to benefit in the formation of our policies with the work of the BSEC in the Wider Black Sea area on policies and specific areas of cooperation where regional authorities have also competence.
2. To make the work of BSEC known to both member regions of the BBSRC and the CPMR in general as the Black Sea constitutes more and more an area of European interest with great potential. We understand that there is a lot of work to be done, as this part of Europe is not that well known even too many regional authorities in the north, west and south of Europe, and also among several CPMR member regions.
3. To make the work of the CPMR known and to benefit from contacts with BSEC and its related bodies in our effort to get in touch with regional authorities where there is currently no CPMR/BBSRC membership like in Russia, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia, Moldova, etc.
4. To contribute to the work of BSEC's working groups in which we can participate. In this respect we will bring the approach of the regions, the regional dimension, on issues and policies which the maritime and peripheral regions of the wider Black Sea area are also immediately concerned by, due to the very fact that they are directly part of the policies and issues dealt within the BSEC.
5. To be aware of the role and implication of BSEC, with the EU policies for the Black Sea under the European Neighborhood Policy and its related specific initiatives, the Black Sea Synergy and the Eastern Partnership.
6. To join forces with BSEC so that EU funding of the specific financial instruments of the EU for the Black Sea region be substantially increased so as to be comparable with other areas.

In our capacity as Sectoral Dialogue Partners, our member regions can take part in the BSEC working groups. However, only the following 4-5 areas of BSEC cooperation are of special interest to our regions which will be asked to send representatives.

1. Ad-hoc group of experts on BSEC-EU interaction;
2. Working group on environmental protection;
3. Working group on cooperation in tourism;
4. Working group on transport (Including the ad-hoc working group on the development of the Motorways of the Sea and the Steering Committee on the development of the Black Sea Ring Highway. In Sofia on 14-15 April, the meeting of the Council of Ministers of Transport of BSEC is scheduled to take place);
5. The working group on culture.

Indeed the work in the field of the coordinated development of the Black Sea Ring Highway and on the development of the Motorways of the Sea could offer to our member regions concrete ways for enhancing the cooperation among us, thus creating new opportunities for sustainable economic development.

For this reason, the 2010 BBSRC General Assembly which will take place in Varna, Bulgaria, on 24 June 2010, will deal with the specific BSEC project of the coordinated development of the Black Sea Ring Highway and of the role the regions can play in this very important project which directly concerns them. Also in Varna, the new President and vice-Presidents of our Commission will also be elected for a 2-year term.

The remaining 2009-2010 work programme of the CPMR Balkan and Black Sea Commission for the period until June 2010 (the scheduled date of the next General Assembly meeting), in accordance with the guidelines established at the June 2009 Odessa General Assembly is as follows:

Monitoring EU policies related to the specific interests of the BBSRC

The BBSRC closely follows the 2 existing EU initiatives with respect to the Black Sea area as part of the EU Neighborhood Policy, namely the Black Sea Synergy and the Eastern Partnership which was launched on 7 May 2009 involving 7 states, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, Republic of Moldova and Ukraine. It is a policy of reinforced bilateral and multilateral cooperation. This initiative plans to lead to the deepening of political and economic relations, more energy security, increased mobility and will give an additional boost to pro-democratic and market oriented reforms in partner countries.

Our Commission was invited by the European Commission to participate in the first meeting of the Eastern Partnership Civil Society Forum, procedure which was established in the framework of the EaP and took place in Brussels on 16-17 November 2009 with the participation of 220 organisations coming from the 7 Eastern Partnership countries but also from the EU, especially international organizations and networks involved in the area. Our participation was important as we presented our policy position on the EaP adopted in the BBSRC Odessa General Assembly of June 2009, with a view to implicating regional authorities in the implementation of the EaP. The 4 working groups of the meeting dealt with the following topics:

- DEMOCRACY, GOOD GOVERNANCE AND STABILITY;
- ECONOMIC INTEGRATION AND CONVERGENCE WITH EU POLICIES;
- ENVIRONMENT, CLIMATE CHANGE AND ENERGY SECURITY;
- CONTACTS BETWEEN PEOPLE.

At the same time, the new EU macroregional strategies will be monitored together with the CPMR secretariat related to the European Commission's work to present an EU strategy for the Danube region before the end of 2010. Also, the initial discussion for the creation of an Adriatic macroregional area headed among others, by the Region of Istria.

Black Sea Joint Operational CBC Programme 2007-2013, under the European Neighbourhood & Partnership Instrument (ENPI) of the EU

Contacts will be maintained with the managing authority of the programme in Bucharest. At the same time, we will continue to exchange information on specific projects among member regions and other entities, for a coordinated approach to the 2nd call for proposals which will take place in 2010. The first call involved an amount of just 3,311,369 Euros plus funds with respect to Turkey which participated with IPA funds amounting to 1,339,401 Euros. The cross-border cooperation projects financed within this call cover the areas of sustainable economic development, tourism, nature and environmental protection and cultural cooperation, areas that correspond to the 3 priorities of the programme. 168 applications were submitted under the first call.

Among the 168 projects, 89 were submitted for Priority 1, 40 for Priority 2 and 39 for Priority 3. A special technical paper has been prepared by the CPMR Secretariat on ENPI – CBC - BLACK SEA BASIN.

Contacts with member regions

Visits to member regions are envisaged and recommended, especially where there is new political leadership and the need to reintroduce our organisation. This is the case in the Bulgarian regions of Burgas and Varna, in some regions in Turkey such as Tekirdag, Canakkale, Edirne, Sinop, and to most of the Greek regions following the recent change of governmental power in Greece. In light of this, a trip to Romania and Bulgaria is scheduled on 4-6 March. We feel that the participation of the CPMR Secretary General will give a higher political importance to our contacts.

BBSRC membership policy

The BBSRC policy of increasing our membership in the wider Black Sea Area and the Balkans will continue. Following our contact with Sebastopol City state administration and their application for membership our efforts will be intensified following the new leadership in the Ukrainian regions after the recent change of power. Efforts to establish contacts with the two Russian regions of Krasnodar and Rostov will also continue, especially through our contacts with the Russian Delegation to the BSEC. It will be advisable to undertake a visit to the competent authorities of the Russian Federation in Moscow by the CPMR, the BBSRC and its two other Regional Commissions concerned namely with the Baltic Sea Commission and the North Sea Commission. Through BSEC and in cooperation with the CPMR it would be also possible to start contacting regional authorities in Armenia, Moldova, Azerbaijan, Albania, etc.

Cooperation with other organisations in the area

Contact will be maintained with other organisations active in the area, including the European Commission, the Commission for External Relations and Decentralised Cooperation of the Committee of the Regions (RELEX), the Chamber of Regions of the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe, the Black Sea Euroregion, and the Adriatic and Ionian Initiative, for which we need the assistance of our member regions from Croatia and Greece. These contacts are important and provide good opportunities for interaction and for promoting our policies and priorities.

Participation of BBSRC member regions in CPMR working groups

Additional effort will be made for the BBSRC member regions to participate in CPMR working group meetings where the policy of the organisation is decided, so that the particular interests of our Commission can be expressed. With the exception of Primorsko-Goranska County (Croatia), Tulcea (Romania), Canakkale (Turkey) and Central Macedonia and Ionian Islands (Greece) in the past, taking part in the working groups on energy, tourism, transport and external cooperation, participation is rather low.

Involvement with the work of the CPMR

The work of the CPMR and its geographical commissions is being closely followed, promoting the special interests and political priorities of the BBSRC and the wider Balkan and Black Sea area by taking part in the CPMR statutory meetings as well as in the meetings of the CPMR Extended Management Committee to include the Executive Secretaries of the Geographical Commissions.

We would now like to share with you that the BBSRC, as a CPMR geographical commission, has some special characteristics which are not common to the other commissions. These briefly are:

- Many of the BBSRC member regions and potential member regions are not from member states of the EU. This means very little experience with EU policies and institutions. At the same time, even for our member regions from EU member states, most of the policies related to the EU are not part of regional competence but part of the central government.
- With the exception of Romania, in all other member regions its president is appointed and not elected which means that he/she has no democratic legitimacy, and can be replaced any time as there is no specific term of office, even when there is no change of governmental power (Greece, Ukraine, Bulgaria, Turkey, etc). At the same time, regions have no legislative power and as I have previously mentioned there is no competence on several policies connected to the EU.

- BBSRC member regions, being at the very periphery of Europe, are hit even more severely by the present economic crisis, which means that there are difficulties with funds available for membership fees and travel expenses which are expensive due to being far from Brussels.
- Communication/language problems. In each member state of our Commission a different language is spoken and the understanding of CPMR working languages English and French is not always easy and documents have to be translated, etc.

With these remarks our report is concluded.

Thank you for your attention.

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