

**Opinion of the Committee of the Regions on 'Black Sea Synergy — A new regional cooperation initiative'**

(2008/C 105/10)

THE COMMITTEE OF THE REGIONS

- welcomes the European Commission's intention to make regional and local development measures more effective through the Black Sea Synergy initiative, harnessing local and regional best practices and promoting their dissemination, exchange and networking actions, but feels that the importance of the local and regional level for the successful implementation of the strategy should be highlighted more clearly;
- welcomes the recent progress of the enlargement process and the accession of Bulgaria and Romania to the EU on 1 January 2007 as a step forward for the democratic and stable development of the Black Sea region, ensuring increased stability, security and prosperity both for the European Union and the Black Sea region countries; similarly, the accession negotiations with Turkey mark another step forward in this direction;
- supports the creation of a maritime identity for the Black Sea region, for all those involved in various maritime activities. Efforts to overcome environmental problems and to develop tourism must be taken into account, provided that traditional cultures are supported and maritime cultural and natural heritage is preserved more effectively;
- calls on the European Commission to strengthen the role of transport in the framework of the future maritime policy, as transport is one of the most important and cross-cutting maritime activities;
- emphasises the importance of including local and regional authorities from the Black Sea region in framing and implementing Community policies linked to migration, with a focus on better management of migration flows so that, with due regard for human rights and public safety, extensive, focused cooperation between law-enforcement agencies and other such bodies ensures that migration takes place in full compliance with the law;
- voices its support for the emerging Black Sea Euroregion intended to promote cooperation at local and regional level between the countries of the region and to support democratic stability, good governance and sustainable development

**Rapporteur:** Krasimir MIREV (BG/PES), Mayor of Targovishte

**Reference document**

Communication from the Commission to the Council and the European Parliament: Black Sea Synergy — A new regional cooperation initiative

COM(2007) 160 final

**Policy recommendations**

THE COMMITTEE OF THE REGIONS

*General policy recommendations*

1. welcomes the European Commission's intention to make regional and local development measures more effective through the Black Sea Synergy initiative, harnessing local and regional best practices and promoting their dissemination, exchange and networking actions, but feels that the importance of the local and regional level for the successful implementation of the strategy should be highlighted more clearly; these should be given fresh impetus as Community policy instruments for economic modernisation, greater competitiveness and bringing the European Union closer to citizens;

2. welcomes the recent progress of the enlargement process and the accession of Bulgaria and Romania to the EU on 1 January 2007 as a step forward for the democratic and stable development of the Black Sea region, ensuring increased stability, security and prosperity both for the European Union and the Black Sea region countries; similarly, the accession negotiations with Turkey mark another step forward in this direction;

3. emphasises the importance of the regional and local perspective on the enlargement process and acknowledges the key role of regional and local policy in ensuring domestic stability, which crucially depends on basic democracy;

4. stresses its support for the accession process, the European Neighbourhood Policy and the strategic partnership with the Russian Federation and supports its involvement and of the other European institutions with a view to supporting the partnership in the Black Sea region, along the lines of the partnerships in the Euro-Mediterranean region, the Baltic region and the North Sea region;

5. notes that regional and local authorities of the Black Sea region play a key role in the following areas: the process of democratic transition and good governance; administrative capacity building; consolidating peace; inter-cultural and inter-faith dialogue; migration; fighting crime; energy; transport and infrastructure planning; urban planning and rural development; and also notes that cooperation between local and regional authorities and civil society in all these areas can play a positive role in serving the interests of communities;

6. emphasises that the Black Sea Synergy initiative ties in directly with its' institutional role; feels therefore that it is essential to make use of its capacity to act and participate; urges that its role in ensuring unified representation of regional and local systems of the European Union be utilised;

7. agrees with the European Commission that in spite of significant positive development over the last few years, disparities remain between the countries of the region in terms of the pace of economic reforms and the quality of governance;

8. is aware that the Commission's initiative is not intended as a new strategy for the Black Sea region; rather, it is envisaged as a process of building on the EU's main guidelines for developing the region, learning, cooperation and dissemination of best practices at regional and local level, by means of territorial cooperation, with a view to achieving the Lisbon and Gothenburg objectives; however, feels that the regional dimension must be strengthened in political terms if the initiative is to succeed;

*Environment, transport, energy and maritime policy*

9. draws attention to the critical state of the environment in the Black Sea region, in particular in the Danube Delta and the other nature reserves in the Black Sea region, and especially to growing eutrophication (i.e. an increase in the primary productivity of any ecosystem), with adverse effects on biodiversity, wetlands and fisheries, and to pollution caused by petrol and sewage;

10. points out that more in-depth analysis of potential environmental threats to the Black Sea region (and to rivers flowing into the region) is needed; these threats arise, amongst other things, from climate change and the resulting risk of natural disasters. In view of this, adequate responses must be identified and cross-border cooperation projects, co-funded by the European Union and intended to improve the management of civil emergencies, must be supported;

11. calls on the European Commission to support the use of renewable energy sources, such as wind power and wave power; there should also be support for additional research activity and innovation in this field;

12. calls on the EU and national governments to strengthen efforts in respect of the development of scientific and technological breakthroughs in the field of marine research, such as 'blue' biotechnology (marine and aquatic applications of biotechnology), navigational guiding systems and tourist activities, thereby addressing present and potential future threats particularly with regards to climate and other change, dwindling fish stocks, unsustainable tourism and the changing demographic patterns within coastal populations;

13. draws attention to the need for better preservation of the maritime heritage, taking into account a possible growth in tourism linked with the development of traditional cultures;

14. supports the creation of a maritime identity for the Black Sea region, for all those involved in various maritime activities. Efforts to overcome environmental problems and to develop tourism must be taken into account, provided that traditional cultures are supported and maritime cultural and natural heritage is preserved more effectively;

15. recommends that the European Commission and national governments support the creation of an accurate regional data base using existing information and detailing economic and environmental aspects of individual maritime resources and their impact from a social perspective;

16. recommends evaluating and coordinating specific strategy plans, along the lines of those established within the Thematic Strategy on the Protection and Conservation of the Marine Environment advocating the setting up of wider marine regions, particularly for semi-enclosed sea basins such as the Black Sea; these should be prepared by the Member States on a proposal from the European Commission;

17. calls on the European Commission to strengthen the role of transport in the framework of the future maritime policy, as transport is one of the most important and cross-cutting maritime activities;

18. calls on the European Commission to spur Member States to implement a more attentive environmental monitoring of the state of pollution on the main maritime routes and thinks that the new GMES technology could be successfully employed for this purpose;

19. proposes to reinvigorate the efforts for completing the sea terminals, starting from those with clear inter-modal characteristics particularly as the realisation of some TEN-T projects affecting the maritime dimension are lagging behind;

20. recommends to strengthen the role of the strategic ports as a priority for the development of the future maritime policy and in parallel to commission a study on the inter-connections between major and secondary ports and on the possible delocalisation and de-concentration of certain port activities towards smaller centres;

21. proposes to the EU and national governments to regulate the extraction activities of traditional maritime energy resources such as oil and gas on the basis of well defined environmental security standards, to implement effective monitoring of such activities, to support initiatives aimed at upgrading or improving port facilities for reception of oily waters and to favour technological innovations in shipping and the handling of oil also by use of land pipelines;

22. recommends that maritime routes be better secured and that investigations be made into the possibility of introducing mandatory pilotage for oil tankers and other ships with dangerous cargo as well as general mandatory pilotage in narrow shipping passages;

23. notes the need to undertake measures to decrease greenhouse gases and supports the scheme for trading of pollution permits;

24. recommends to develop scenarios for coastal protection measures that may be necessary, based on the various forecasts for the rise in sea levels and changing weather conditions;

25. calls on EU and national governments to coordinate and assist the marine regions in identifying ways for the successful protection of the existing environment and in particular in establishing trans-regional and/or trans-national marine protection zones and developing concrete proposals for the significant reduction of radioactive discharges, of pollution caused by ships (in particular the gases emitted, discharges and ballast water), and to support efforts ensuring the quality of coastal and off-shore ecosystems and habitats, also keeping in view the significant impact which economic activity can have on the state of the marine environment, particularly through the discharge of nutrients into the sea;

#### *Education, cultural diversity and inter-faith dialogue*

26. emphasises the key role of local and regional authorities in supporting and celebrating the cultures of communities in the Black Sea region and calls on the European Commission to assist local and regional authorities in participating in new EU cultural programmes (Culture 2007);

27. takes note of the social and economic benefits which the development of culture and its diversity brings to the countries of the region, thus contributing to achievement of the Lisbon objectives;

28. emphasises that inter-cultural cooperation and inter-faith dialogue need to be stepped up to make use of cultural diversity as an instrument bringing people together in a multilingual, multicultural Europe;

29. notes the need for focused efforts at regional and local level for building trust in the region and the peaceful resolution of 'frozen conflicts' through special programmes for cooperation;

30. reiterates the need to maintain a multilingual approach in an enlarged Europe, as this is a vital tool for including citizens in the common European political project;

31. calls on the EU and national governments to support programmes and projects targeted at interregional youth cooperation at local and regional level;

#### *Migration, employment and social affairs*

32. emphasises the importance of including local and regional authorities from the Black Sea region in framing and implementing Community policies linked to migration, with a focus on better management of migration flows so that, with due regard for human rights and public safety, extensive, focused cooperation between law-enforcement agencies and other such bodies ensures that migration takes place in full compliance with the law;

33. endorses EU political instruments supporting activities aimed at fostering social integration of migrants through programmes specifically targeted at local and regional authorities;

34. welcomes the initiatives planned by the European Commission to combat illegal immigration and the support for exchange of best practices in that sphere;

35. supports inclusion of local and regional authorities of the Black Sea region in developing and implementing Community migration policies, and notes that the framing of common migration policy programmes at local and regional level may ensure future economic development, with stronger economic growth and greater prosperity in regions;

36. welcomes the EU initiatives on equal opportunities at local and regional level and calls on national governments to provide support in this respect;

#### *Good governance, regional initiatives and networking*

37. values what has been achieved in the region since 1989 by initiatives such as the Black Sea Economic Cooperation (BSEC) and the Parliamentary Assembly of the Black Sea Economic Cooperation (PABSEC);

38. emphasises the need to develop and coordinate the experience of existing regional initiatives linking the Black Sea

region with the EU with added European value, such as the Danube Cooperation Process, with emphasis on territorial and thematic complementarity;

39. recommends improved coordination between the various initiatives at national and regional level in the region, and wherever possible definition of their respective spheres of activity, in order to avoid overlap and to achieve specific results;

40. recommends disseminating existing regional and local best practice examples, particularly with regard to local economic clusters, research networking, public-private partnerships, spatial planning and good governance, and encouraging and supporting local and regional authorities from the countries of the Black Sea region in developing such examples of best practice;

41. agrees with the approach emphasised by the European Parliament and the Commission concerning the role of local and regional authorities in communication, enabling public consensus and contributing to greater transparency and accountability;

42. welcomes all appropriate EU measures to help the development of individual countries, for example in combating corruption and organised crime, and in assisting the establishment of effective administrative structures, a process which inevitably also has to involve the regional and local levels; in this context, also welcomes any appropriate initiatives to support the autonomous development of political and economic cooperation in the region;

43. calls on the EU and national governments to support programmes and projects for regional and local administrative staff mobility as a tool for the establishment of closer contacts, exchange of experience and better performance;

44. recommends involving organisations that bring together locally elected representatives and represent their concerns in talks scheduled as part of the ongoing political dialogue between the EU and the countries of the region;

45. calls on national governments in the region to respect the principles of the European Charter of Local Self-government;

#### *Cross-border and inter-regional cooperation*

46. emphasises the potential positive role of local and regional authorities and in particular of mayors in developing civil society in the region, particularly in territories where national authorities lack strong democratic traditions;

47. voices its support for the emerging Black Sea Euroregion intended to promote cooperation at local and regional level between the countries of the region and to support democratic stability, good governance and sustainable development;

48. notes that there is scope for collaboration with the Council of Europe, within the framework of cooperation agreed on by the two institutions;

49. highlights the role of its established working groups as a useful instrument for supporting pre-candidate and candidate countries' local and regional authorities in their efforts to open

up opportunities and develop the necessary political dialogue between the EU, pre-candidate and candidate countries;

50. appreciates the European Commission's proposal that the initiative should be locally organised in the region, with partners assuming shared responsibility for its implementation; advocates inclusion of local and regional authorities in this process, given that this will facilitate continued development of contacts between Black Sea cities and municipalities, universities, cultural operators and civil society organisations, including consumer organisations.

Brussels, 7 February 2008.

The President  
of the Committee of the Regions  
Luc VAN DEN BRANDE

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