

THE BLACK SEA SYNERGY INITIATIVE – A DEVELOPING BACKGROUND FOR REGIONAL COOPERATION

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We could say that for Romania, everything started on the 1st January 2007, when two riparian states of the Black Sea, Bulgaria and Romania, joined the European Union. More than ever, the prosperity, stability and the security of our neighbours around the Black Sea, represent an interest for the European Union.

The Black Sea region is an expanding market with high growth potential, and an important hub for energy and transport flows. Even so, it is still a region with unsolved frozen conflicts, with many environmental problems and insufficient border controls, thus the illegal migration and organized crime are encouraged.

The Black Sea region offers opportunities and challenges which demand a coordinated action at a regional level. And here we talk about the key sectors such as energy, transportation, environment, circulation and security. The purpose of the consolidated regional cooperation is not necessarily related to solving long-standing conflicts from the region, but could lead to greater mutual trust, that in time could have a word in banishing some obstacles. Considering the confluence of cultures in the Black Sea region, a higher regional cooperation could have great benefits outside the region as well.

Therefore, it is time for the European Union to become more involved in defining cooperation priorities and regional mechanisms.

Presented as a Communication of the European Commission to the European Council and to the European Parliament, and made public on the 11th of April 2007, the Black Sea Synergy synthesizes the point of view of the European Union on the cooperation with the countries around the Black Sea². Its subtitle – a new regional cooperation

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²Black Sea Synergy – *bringing the region closer to the European Union*, http://europa.eu/rapid/press_Releases_Action.do?reference=IP/07/format=PDF&aged=1&language=RO&quillangu age=fr, accessed on the 10th of January 2010.

initiative – is somewhat deceiving because, in reality, the Black Sea Synergy is not an independent strategy of the European Union, because the European policy in the region is already well defined in three well-delineated and different dimensions: Turkey's pre-accession strategy, the European Neighbourhood Policy – mainly for the Eastern European new independent western states; and the strategic partnership with Russia. It would rather be seen as a complementary initiative related to the policies that focus on the regional level, which, up until now, the mostly two-sided European Neighbourhood Policy has been lacking, in order to quicken the cooperation not only around the Black Sea region, but also between the Black Sea region and the European Union. Also, considering the strategy of the European Union for Central Asia, the Black Sea Synergy has got some important inter-regional components.

The Black Sea Synergy appears to be a flexible background in order to ensure a greater consistency and better guidance for the existing policies in this area. The idea of the European Commission is to complete the existing policies, to give a bigger visibility to this area and to contribute to the stimulation of the actual process of regional cooperation through an intensified dialogue, which would increase the trust between the concerned countries. Due to the fact that the activities of the Black Sea Synergy are highly related to the neighboring regions, especially the Caspian Sea, Central Asia, and the South-Eastern Europe, its radius could be extended beyond the Black Sea region³.

This initiative comes from knowing that the Black Sea Region is a developing market, a turntable for the energetic streams and for the transportation tracks, which has got serious challenges, such as frozen conflicts, illegal migration, organized crime and environmental issues.

The Black Sea Synergy also recommends the European Union contacts intensification⁴ with the regional organization, and, above all, with the Black Sea Economical Cooperation Organization.

Regarding the financial problems, the main principle is that of co-financing. The financial support of the Community is given through national, regional and border programs of the European Neighbourhood and Partnership Instrument, and also through

³ *Black Sea Synergy – A New Regional Cooperation Initiative*, Communication from the Commission to the Council and the European Parliament, Brussels, 11 April 2007.

⁴ Black Sea Synergy – bringing the region closer to the European Union, http://europa.eu/rapid/press_Releases_Action.do?reference=IP/07/format=PDF&aged=1&language=RO&qui language=fr, accessed on the 10th of January 2010.

other external assistance instruments and for Member States under the European Regional Development.

Nowadays, the Synergy has lost some part of interest, especially because of the East Partnership Initiative⁵. Romania has, as a main promoter of the Synergy, the role of establishing the objectives and of turning them into concrete projects, that has to be on the agenda of the European Union, especially from the point of view of the implementation of the mechanisms and instruments and financial resources.

Romania stands for the creation and consolidation of the environmental partnership, Bulgaria for energy and Greece for transports. Each partnership has to be organized so that its main goal to be the concrete project. Even so, the European Union can not directly finance large investment projects, but they can offer grants to serve for the project establishment and preparation, which then can be presented to the institutions that are prepared to invest in the Black Sea infrastructure.

From the European Commission point of view the project funding will come from the Regional Policy Fund and the European Neighbourhood Investment Fund, following the adoption of specific decisions. But the European Union will not be the only funder of these projects. Part of the funding will be provided by contributors in the area, given that this initiative will be jointly owned by the partners from the Black Sea region.

This fully transparent and inclusive initiative is based on common interests of the European Union and Black Sea region and consider the results of consultations with all Black Sea states. It can also contribute to establish synergies and to capitalization of the experience gained, through the existing regional initiatives connecting the Black Sea region to European Union, such as the Danube Cooperation Process⁶.

The Black Sea Synergy may extend beyond the region itself since many activities are closely linked to neighboring regions, especially the Caspian Sea, Central Asia and South East. Thus, there is a close link between the Black Sea approach and the Strategy of the European Union for Central Asia. The Black Sea cooperation should include important

⁵ Oana Mihaela Mocanu, „European Neighbourhood Policy - further initiatives. Romania's contribution”, in *EIR studies collection*, No. 23, Bucharest, September 2009, page. 30.

⁶ Initiative developed by Austria, Romania, European Commission and Stability Pact to enlarge and strengthen the Danube cooperation and to give a well-defined political and economical dimension.

interregional elements. It should also be taken into account the other regional cooperation programs backed by international organizations and others countries⁷.

The Black Sea Synergy focuses on those issues and areas of cooperation which reflect common priorities and where the presence and the support of the European Union are already significant. So, this initiative has a number of short and medium term objectives. These objectives are:

1. Democracy, human rights and the good governance

The European Council and the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe settled rules considering the human rights and democracy which apply to all Black Sea countries. This way, the actions of the European Union are mainly two-sided. However, the actions done at a regional level can play an important role in consolidating and stimulating the national measures. For the past few years, the regional organizations at the Black Sea have taken the commitment to create efficient democratic institutions, to promote the good governance and the rule of law. The European Union must support these regional initiatives by sharing the experience acquired through the measures for promoting and defending the human rights and the democracy, through submitting training and exchange programs and through stimulating the regional dialogue with the civil society.

2. Migration management and security improvement

Improving border management and customs cooperation at regional level increases security⁸, helps to fight against transnational organized crime, such as: trafficking in human beings, arms and drugs, and helps to prevent and to manage the illegal migration. The European Union assistance mission at borders in Moldova and in Ukraine is a success and proves that this kind of measures may equally help to solve conflicts.

⁷ For example programs of the United Nations, Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe, and European Council, or Black Sea Trust for Regional Cooperation in the United States.

⁸ Nick Butler, „Energy Security. A New Agenda For Europe”, Oct-Nov 2004, in *CER Bulletin*, Issue 38, www.cer.org.uk, accessed on the 19 May 2010.

3. Managing the frozen conflicts

The Black Sea region is one of the richest in conflict situations and the only one that hosts “frozen” conflicts on the European continent. The separatist movements in Eastern Moldavia (Transnistria), west and north of Georgia (Abkhazia and South Ossetia), west of Azerbaijan (Nagorno-Karabakh), south of the Russian Federation (Chechnya and other republics or autonomous regions in the North Caucasus), as well as the stresses generated by some territorial conflicts and/or boundary, are serious threats not only for the territorial integrity and dominion of the states within they take part, but also for the security of the whole region.

The European Union, the United States of America and Russia divided their responsibility for the life of this region⁹. Any unilateral attempt of these great geopolitical actors to solve the frozen conflicts in the region is destined to fail. All three parties should cooperate to end the quasi-state entities that are not internationally recognized, such as the ones reunited in the unofficial organization TAKO (Transnistria, Abkhazia, Nagorno-Karabakh and South Ossetia) that turned into a key pile of the existing organized crime in the region.

Romania has pronounced itself many times for the necessity of active involvement of the international community in order to solve the frozen conflicts and proposes to use its triple status of a NATO member, of an European Union member, and of a country that hosts U.S. military troops, in order to maintain this problem as a priority on the international political life’s main characters agenda.

4. Energy

The Black Sea region is a productive and distributive area that is highly important to the energetic security of the European Union¹⁰. It has a significant potential to diversify

⁹ Officials in Moscow even threatened that Russia will not resume contacts with NATO if the Alliance does not cancel military exercises in Georgia. In September 2008, after the war in Georgia, NATO suspended unilaterally cooperation with Russia. Only in March 2009 NATO announced a resumption of cooperation with Russian Federation. Broadly, Financiar Paper, April 22, 2009, accessible on the website, http://www.financiarul.com/articol_25269/rusia-ameninta-cu-inghetarea-relatiilor-cu-nato-.html, accessed on 21 May 2010.

¹⁰ *Black Sea Synergy – bringing the region closer to the European Union*, at http://europa.eu/rapid/press_Releases_Action.do?reference=IP/07/format=PDF&aged=1&language=RO&qui language=fr, accessed on the 10th of January 2010.

the energy supply and it is an essential element for the external strategy of the European Union in the energy zone. Diversifying the security of energy supply is a main interest for our partners in the region and for the European Union as well.

The European Union supports as well the countries in the region in order for them to focus more on the alternative energy sources, on the energetic efficiency and on the energetic economy, so as to release important energy sources. The European Union has a close collaboration with the regional partners, in order to intensify the energetic stability by updating the existing energetic structure and by building new substructures. In order for this to happen, the Commission is developing, in collaboration with its partners, a new energetic passageway along the Caspian Sea – Black Sea axe. The passageway previously mentioned offers more technical possibilities for further natural gas exports from Central Asia, going through the Black Sea region, to the European Union.

5. Transportation

The Commission must continue supporting actively the regional cooperation in matters of transportation in order to improve the efficiency, the safety and the security of the transport operations. The European Union could turn to profit the experience acquired during some transportation initiatives from the Black Sea region.

Aerial safety and the expansion of the mutual aerial space are important goals. Considering the growing necessities in the field of hydrocarbons transport, the maritime safety is a priority. The Commission proposed to make use of all the advantages the short-distance maritime transport has and of the internal navigation ways, especially of the Danube.

6. Environment

There are many regional actions in the environmental field, but their follow-out is delayed. Solving the regional sea environmental issues is necessary, thus the Marine Strategy of the European Union and submitting a Directive for the strategy concerning the marine environment taken into account by the Commission in 2005. According to the marine strategy of the European Union, the countries that are members of the European

Union must cooperate in all the regional seas where the European Union is a riparian, with every country in the region.

7. The maritime policy

The Black Sea Synergy offers a dialogue opportunity concerning the emerging maritime policy within the Union, with the aim of maximizing the abiding growth and the aim of creating work places within the branches connected to the sea and within the coastal regions. This means to create not only a network of intersectorial maritime cooperation between services, enterprises and science institutions, but also to improve the cooperation and the integration concerning maritime surveillance in order to make sure of the safety and the security of the maritime transport and of environment protection.

8. Fishing

The Black Sea is a region where fishing is important, and most stocks are trans-boundary. Some stocks are on a sticky wicket, and the regional actions are necessary to rebuild them. The goal of the European Union is to promote the reliable development by managing fishing, by data collection and by stock evaluation in the Black Sea region.

9. Commerce

The European Union is an important economical and trade partner to the Black Sea countries¹¹, and the tight economic cooperation connections, as well as the preferential trade connections are an important element to our concern. The organizations of regional cooperation at the Black Sea developed many initiatives in order to create free-trade areas. Mainly, the European Union befriends actions that contribute to a real trade liberalization, as long as they match the versatile trading system and express the existing agreements between the European Commission and the European Union member states. No matter the initiative, there has to be considered the fact that the European Union member states and the countries related through a customs union to the common trading policy of the European Union cannot take part independently in the regional free trade systems.

¹¹ *Black Sea Synergy – bringing the region closer to the European Union*, http://europa.eu/rapid/press_Releases_Action.do?reference=IP/07/format=PDF&aged=1&language=RO&qui language=fr, accessed on the 10th of January 2010.

10. Research and education networks

There is a mutual interest in creating a high-speed connection between the research communities and education and in promoting the harmonization of legal and regulatory framework of these countries with the one belonging to the European Union. In order for that to happen, the establishment of some independent and efficient regulation authorities is absolutely necessary. Moreover, the development of broadband substructures and the introduction of online services in the fields of government, electronic trade, health and the use of information and communication technology in education and research, must be encouraged.

11. Science and technology

The Commission desires to promote the consolidation of the capabilities and the dialogue in matters of Science and Technology policy with the Black Sea countries¹², especially with the help of the new available instruments within the seventh research Frame – program.

12. Employment and social affairs

The partners countries at the Black Sea have got similar challenges, such as a high level of unemployment, a broadly extended informal economy, have got problems concerning promoting the decent work, for example the social dialogue, social protection and equal opportunities for both men and women. The fight against poverty and social marginalization is placed in the centre of many action plans of the European Neighbourhood Policy. Regional cooperation on the aspects described previously could bring value-added, especially concerning the information and practices exchange, as well as awareness initiatives, including training programs for the involved workers, for the social partners and the organizations of the civil society.

¹² European Commission, Communication from the Commission to the Council and the European Parliament *Black Sea Sinergy-A New Cooperation Initiative*, Brussels, in http://ec.europa.eu/world/enp/pdf/com_07_160_en.pdf, accessed on the 11 April 2010.

13. Regional development

Starting with Bulgaria and Romania's adhesion, financing the regional policy of the European Union has become accessible for the first time in the coast area of the Black Sea. Regional policy programs in these two member states contribute to the improvement of the competitiveness and especially of the environment in the coast areas. The regional initiative of the European Union for the Black Sea aims at applying a global strategy that would include all the states in the region; the high number of members the Organization of the Black Sea Economic Cooperation and the fact that Russia and Turkey are founding members is, therefore, a winning advantage that could have a big word to say in the success of the Black Sea Synergy.

At the same time, the Commission will remain open-minded to all adequate cooperation possibilities that may come from other regional agencies or from other initiatives. Considering the emphasis laid on regional networks and partnerships, the Black Sea Forum may prove itself to be extremely useful non-governmentally and the civil societies level as well.

A SWOT analysis shows us quite exactly which is the territorial cooperation context at the Black Sea, considering as an aiming point the existing European policy and initiatives in the area.

Its strong points are: the geostrategic position of the Black Sea as a new south-eastern border of the European Union; its attribute of a huge market for the exports of the European Union; its low employment costs; its well-developed abilities and capacities of the human resources, compared to competitors that are tightly connected with the European Union; its potential of a net inflow of Foreign Direct Investments; its role as a link in the Eurasian energy resources transport to the consumers from the European Union through the geopolitical and geo-economical emerging Mediterranean Sea – Black Sea – Caspian Sea axe; its attribute of a buffer zone in which the western, the Islamic and the orthodox cultures and civilizations reunite; its valuable cultural patrimony, its human resources and various social values.

Its weaknesses were: the particularity of the Black Sea of an almost closed sea, which has a negative repercussion on the environment, concerning the pollution induced by economic agents situated in the Black Sea; the constraints for the economic

development traceable to climatic conditions, especially in southern areas, and because of the degradation of the environment; the regional disparities within the region and outside of it in the economical development; the low quality of industrial and transport substructures; the low level of the administration ability to implement the local developing policy; its security issues generated by corruption, by organized crime, by illicit traffic, terrorism and frozen conflicts.

The fundamental mission of the Black Sea Synergy is, therefore, to develop the cooperation within the Black Sea region and between the whole region and the European Union as well.

To conclude with, in order for the original geophysical platform to achieve security, stability and prosperity, the harmonization and the enlargement of the Europeans, the Asians and the Africans' efforts to create a new and lasting relation at the Black Sea and at the Mediterranean Sea, is necessary. It is time to leave the shadows of the past and to prepare a new future in which synergizing spaces of contact, of confluence and of connection at a Euro-Afro-Asian level has its place.