Smart and Blue – new opportunities for the blue economy of the Black Sea – Supporting maritime business growth

Black Sea Stakeholder Conference, 24 March 2015, Sofia, Bulgaria

Mrs. Ketevan Moistsrafeshvili, Governor of Guria Region, Georgia

Mr. Minister Moskovski, Ladies and Gentlemen,

Last year, in Romania, the First Black Sea Stakeholder Conference was addressed by the Deputy Minister of Environment and Natural Resources Protection of Georgia. I am extremely pleased and thankful to the organisers, European Commission, for this opportunity to address the Second Stakeholder Conference, held in another European Black Sea Country – Bulgaria, representing my country of Georgia and my region – Guria!

There are 12 historic-administrative parts in Georgia. The Black Sea coast of Georgia is bordered by two Autonomous Republics, and two Regions – one of them – Guria.

Guria is located in the south-west of Georgia, along the Black Sea coast, mostly on Kolkheti Lowland. Its population is around 139.8 thousand.

Guria Region consists of fours Municipalities (Lanchkhuti, Ozurgeti, the City of Ozurgeti and Chokhatauri). Since 2014 Ozurgeti obtained the administrative status of the self-governing town. Ozurgeti is in 350 kilometres distance from the airport of capital Tbilisi. Another international airport in Batumi is located in 60 kilometres. Batumi is the port city as well. Adjacent to our Region is the city of Poti and its port.

Executive branch of the government in lead by the Governor of Guria Region, with administration headquartered in Ozurgeti.

Natural and geographic characteristics, coastal and high mountain recreation zones, mineral waters and other natural resources create attractive environment and allows for variously types of tourism developments. Length of our coastline is 22 kilometres.

Despite quite short coastline, Guria hosts significant coastal tourism, famous with dark black shiny sandy beaches. Coastal resorts include Ureki, Shekvetili and Grigoleti, while high mountain resorts are located in Bakhmaro (at elevation of 2050 metres) and Gomismta (at 2130 metres).

Resort town of Ureki is located in Ozurgeti Municipality, in south-western part of the Kolkheti Lowland. Beaches of Ureki are unique, with magnetite content reaching 70 percent. Healing characteristics are attributing to beaches of coastal resorts Shekvetili and Grigoleti as well. It should be noted, that Shekvetili hosts the modern amusement park for children 'Tsitsinatela'. Nearby under construction is the major state-of-the-art concert hall, which is expected to be commissioned in summer of 2015.

Guria is known with its coastal floodplains and productive agriculture, the globally significant and unique Ramsar wetlands of the Kolkheti National Park and last but not least, the famous Georgian cuisine and hospitality.

Apart from beautiful mountainous and coastal landscapes, beach tourism and coastal conservation, maritime sector of Guria is given global prominence by the transhipment of Azeri oil through pipeline, terminal and offshore loading facility operated by BP at Supsa.

Guria followed the footsteps of the neighbouring Adjara Autonomous Republic of Georgia and joined as full member the Assembly of European Regions in 2008, striving for integration with the European values, strengthening cooperation between the Regions of Europe and enhancing international visibility of Guria Region. The Assembly of European Regions is the largest independent network of regional authorities in wider Europe, bringing together over 250 regions from 35 countries along with 15 interregional organisations.

Guria actively captures all opportunities of participation in European programmes and initiatives. Black Sea Cross-Border Cooperation is particularly attractive European instrument for regional integration. We indeed look forward to participation of our

governmental and non-governmental organisations and small and medium size enterprises in regional cooperation through Black Sea Cross-Border Cooperation and other European mechanisms.

It is worth highlighting, that administrative borders of the Guria Region essentially coincide with ecological boundaries of our watersheds. With improved sanitation and waste management practices, where we would strongly benefit from greater support and sharing of European experience, Guria could indeed improve the protection of river basins, coastal zones and marine environment, by following the approaches compatible with Water Framework Directive, Marine Strategy Framework Directive and newly adopted Maritime Spatial Planning Directive. Approximation with these governance arrangements are strongly present in EU-Georgia Association Agreement, signed in late 2014. Guria could indeed be the excellent test bed for comprehensive implementation of European compatible regulations.

If managing our lands is in our hands, management of maritime spaces is impossible without cooperation and integration of policies with the countries bordering the Black Sea. With maritime tourism as seasonal but major branch of economy in our Region, we have very strong stake in Integrated Maritime Policies, promoted by the European Union. I trust that we all can achieve more by cooperation and integration.

I would like to conclude my address by reinterpreting the recent statement of a popular saying by the Commissioner Vella: "all politics is local". In the context of our conference:

Maritime Policies for the Black Sea must be Smart & Blue, and the meaning of the local is – the European Regions – including the Region of Guria!

Thank you for the attention.