



Published on *Maritime Affairs* (<https://ec.europa.eu/maritimeaffairs>)

Smart and Blue - New opportunities for the blue economy of the Black Sea

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24/03/2015

Speech by Karmenu Vella - Commissioner for Environment, Maritime Affairs and Fisheries at the 2nd Black Sea Stakeholders conference, Sofia, 24 March 2015

Minister Moskovski,
Ministers,
Esteemed guests,

Introduction

I too wish to welcome you warmly to this conference, my first official visit in Bulgaria.

The Black Sea is of immense geographical, environmental and economic importance.

In Bulgaria and Romania alone, the five largest sectors of the blue economy create a total of 160.000 jobs and a Gross Value Added of over 1,2 billion euro. Impressive numbers. One can only imagine the potential of the marine and maritime sectors in all littoral states of the Black Sea.

And yet today is only the second time that blue economy stakeholders from all littoral states and particularly from all maritime and marine sectors have come together to discuss cooperation.

So I'm all the more grateful for the opportunity to meet you all.

The value of cooperation

I believe the case for cooperation has never been stronger than today and the political circumstances have never been more pressing.

The size - and future job creation potential - of sectors such as coastal tourism, fisheries and shipping underline the importance of good relations. In a situation where interests often overlap, we need to look at each and every activity in a regional context. The big picture is what counts.

Our shared challenge is to craft partnerships and processes that transcend all kinds of borders across the Black Sea region: across states and across sectors, so that we can instil an attitude of mutual benefit.

Even for a sea basin as diverse as this one, this collective work is what can truly bring us forward.

I am fully committed towards maritime cooperation, and I intend to intensify my efforts to become an effective supporter for the region.

As I'm also responsible for environmental policies, we have perfect scope to find even more areas for smart synergies.

How to go smart

Let me elaborate on what being "smart" means in this context.

It means finding the right balance between our economic pursuits and the protection of our resources and nature.

And that means using marine resources and the expanses of sea in a harmonized way.

Maritime Spatial Planning

I would like to give you a few examples, starting with **maritime spatial planning**:

Look at our coasts – we have harbours, hotels, marinas, leisure areas, aquaculture farms... all competing for a small space. This is why within the EU we are now implementing the maritime spatial planning legislation; a process, that is, to plan the human usage of maritime space rationally and to establish the appropriate cross border cooperation for that.

We are about to launch a pilot project in the marine border area between Bulgaria and Romania; and we expect it to produce a plan for the intelligent use of that maritime space and also recommendations for how to cooperate among countries. This is only the second pilot project of its kind!

I would very much encourage all countries to set up similar projects, starting within their own national waters or even across borders. Competition for space is an issue that needs to be addressed now, before space gets too crowded – and the EU can support you financially to do so.

MSFD

Another example is the **Marine Strategy Framework Directive**, which aims to protect biodiversity and restore the health of our marine waters by 2020. To do this each EU Member State is required to develop and regularly update a strategy for its marine waters, including waters that are shared with others.

I think that, much in the same way, the waters and the environment of the Black Sea deserve our specific attention and require the collaboration of all.

Bucharest Convention

The EU has been seeking to become a party to the **Bucharest Convention** since the accession of Bulgaria and Romania and I would like to reiterate this request today.

Our experience with the Barcelona Convention for the Mediterranean and the HELCOM for the Baltic Sea shows that our involvement brought both political and financial benefits to Member States and third countries alike in each sea basin.

There's no doubt in mind that there would be mutual benefits in the Black Sea as well, because the marine environment cannot be protected by one country alone. The opportunities for cooperation and joined-up action will make our endeavours more effective.

Environment, tourism

We already have projects underway to strengthen **monitoring capacities** of the Black Sea marine environment - with the participation of all six coastal States; whereas for tourism and culture the EU has funded the "**Black Sea Silk Road Corridor**", which re-traces for modern tourists the route of the western Silk Road and allows them to follow on the footsteps of ancient traders by means of a smartphone application.

But I believe the tourism opportunities of the Black Sea are much bigger, particularly considering the cruise sector. I would like to hear your ideas to develop them.

Marine knowledge

We are also supporting the creation of a **single digital map** of Europe's seabed including geology, habitats and marine life.

Ten institutions from all Black Sea countries have been pooling the data they have collected in recent years, and a first version of the map is expected already next year. Data is available through a single web portal, the European Marine Observation and Data Network.

We can then use this scientific knowledge to underpin our decisions and actions.

Fisheries management

I already mentioned the necessity of collective effort and fisheries management is a case in point: the efforts of any one country in isolation are of little use if the neighbouring country keeps overexploiting the seas.

Regional fisheries management has to be effective and equitable, and the General Fisheries Commission for the Mediterranean is the appropriate forum for this.

If all goes well we will soon have a fishery Advisory Council for the Black Sea, so that the sector as well as other stakeholders can be effectively consulted in the policy-making process.

The EU as a donor in the region

In terms of EU-Black Sea cooperation, the main political framework so far has been the **Black Sea Synergy**, which includes maritime integration.

The implementation report highlights that over the last five years the EU has invested 140 million euro to reinforce regional dialogue and cooperation.

And since we are on the subject, let me stress that the EU is ready to support the sustainable marine and maritime development for the region.

Bulgaria and Romania have a total share of 250 million euro under the new **European Maritime and**

Fisheries Fund.

The new Operational programmes for Bulgaria and Romania, under the **European Structural and Investment Funds**, as well as the **Association Agreements** with Georgia, Ukraine and Moldova, are designed to foster maritime cooperation in the Black Sea and develop integrated approaches.

As for the new **Cross-border Cooperation Programme** for the Black Sea, its budget has been increased to 49 million euro, up from 36 million euro in the previous round.

All Black Sea countries are eligible for project support and I urge you to prepare applications.

Instruments for Pre-accession and European Neighbourhood are also available.

More money will be coming in through our research programme **Horizon 2020**, also open to partners from the whole region.

In fact research institutes and businesses from the region are already implementing a major research project, the Black Sea Horizon, with a budget worth 1.5 million euro.

I won't go into any more detail on this, because I know that in the working sessions you will hear many more concrete examples of how EU engagement can benefit the region's maritime development.

Suffice it to say that all these funds are available for cooperation across countries and it is up to the national administrations and maritime actors to be proactive and use them to drive the blue economy forward.

The case for integration

I recommend going into smart partnerships between national and regional levels, and between these levels and industry and civil society.

A joined-up approach can resolve bottlenecks, avoid duplication and channel investment directly towards more jobs.

Europe has tangible evidence of this – evidence that integration pays. Over the last few years the European Commission has gathered extensive experience and we are ready to share our expertise, our tools and our resources. And let me emphasize that we provide the tools but it is for you to build the structure that best suits you.

Two things are essential for this process to move forward.

The first is **commitment** – and you have that from my part.

My services are also finalising a comprehensive study to better understand the situation of the marine and maritime domain in the non-EU states around the Black Sea and to get insight on their potential for the blue economy. Many of you here today have been giving us your insights and views – many thanks for this.

This knowledge will allow us to develop and support projects that span across maritime sectors and that can be carried out by several nations at the same time.

We expect the first results later this spring and we will of course consult you on the outcome.

My intention is to set up a dedicated project for technical support on maritime integration with the national contact points in each coastal country and I also plan to launch a dedicated call for proposals this year on the same subject.

The second is **ownership**.

The best way to have you on board is to help you develop *your own* national maritime strategies, help you craft *your own* collaborative projects across sectors and between states and help you shape *your own* blue economy the way *you* deem fit.

If there is anything we have learned with the strategies for the Baltic, the Mediterranean and the Atlantic, it is that the process needs to be participatory and inclusive.

My team and I are here to listen!

Conclusion

I do hope for, and expect, constant input and feedback on your part. I would certainly like to keep on holding these annual meetings and I would especially like *your* ideas to shape *our* policies.

Despite all the political upheavals, my aspiration is for the Black Sea to find its own way towards a common maritime agenda.

The best way to achieve that is by ensuring as many actors are on board by tailoring assistance to their specific country needs. This conference is built on that principle of inclusiveness. I look forward to us making very significant steps on that basis.

Thank you for your attention.

More information

[Event web page](#) ^[1]

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