

Black Sea Synergy: the way forward

Policy Paper

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Athens, February 2020

The **International Centre for Black Sea Studies (ICBSS)** was founded in 1998 as a not-for-profit organisation. It has since fulfilled a dual function: on the one hand, it is an independent research and training institution focusing on the Black Sea region. On the other hand, it is a related body of the Organisation of the Black Sea Economic Cooperation (BSEC) and in this capacity serves as its acknowledged think-tank. Thus, the ICBSS is a uniquely positioned independent expert on the Black Sea area and its regional cooperation dynamics.



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A. Introduction

Within the framework of the EU Black Sea Synergy Initiative, the International Centre for Black Sea Studies (ICBSS) organised the **Regional Stakeholders Conference 'Black Sea Synergy: the way forward'** (Athens, 7 November 2019) with the aim to stimulate the discussion on the future of the Black Sea Synergy in the short and medium term.

Particular emphasis was placed on four cooperation fields that have known less progress over the years, namely **tourism and culture, education, transport, and energy**. The present policy paper includes the key results and recommendations concerning the abovementioned cooperation priorities, as discussed during the Conference.

B. Concept

Launched in 2007, the **Black Sea Synergy initiative** aims at supporting regional development through cooperation, in a bottom-up and project-oriented approach. The key elements of the Black Sea Synergy include building confidence, fostering regional dialogue and achieving tangible results for states and citizens in the region¹.

In the **Joint Staff Working Document 'Black Sea Synergy: review of a regional cooperation initiative – period 2015 -2018'**(2019)², the EC and the European External Action Service (EEAS) offer a detailed implementation report, highlighting best practices, lessons learnt and key opportunities for further development.

In a sector-oriented approach, the review identifies a number of cooperation fields with significant progress: blue growth, maritime policy, marine research and innovation, fisheries, environmental protection and climate change, cross-border cooperation and civil society engagement.

Additionally, although less developed at the moment, fields of cooperation such as culture and tourism, education, transport, and energy, are acknowledged with great potential for cooperation.

Within this context, and as a follow-up to the High-Level Conference on BSEC – EU Cooperation (Brussels, 18 June 2019), the International Centre for Black Sea Studies organised the **Regional Stakeholders Conference 'Black Sea Synergy: the way forward'**, in Athens, Greece, on **Thursday 7 November 2019**.

In a bottom-up approach, the main objective of the Conference was to provide a platform for dialogue for stakeholders from EU/MS and non-EU Black Sea countries, to stimulate the discussion on the future of the Black Sea Synergy initiative in a project-oriented way, placing special emphasis to the cooperation fields identified with less progress, **i.e. tourism and culture, education, transport, energy**; as well as to highlight best practices and opportunities for synergies in the wider Black Sea region.

The event was organised by the International Centre for Black Sea Studies within the framework of the Hellenic BSEC Chairmanship-in-Office (1.7 – 31.12.2019). The event was co-funded by DG NEAR, within the framework of the ENI East Instrument.

C. Implementation & Objectives

¹ The countries covered by the EU's Black Sea Synergy initiative are: Armenia, Azerbaijan, Bulgaria, Georgia, Greece, Romania, the Republic of Moldova, the Russian Federation, Turkey and Ukraine.

² https://eeas.europa.eu/sites/eeas/files/swd_2019_100_f1_joint_staff_working_paper_en_v3_p1_1013788-1.pdf

In total, more than 90 regional stakeholders participated in the Conference, from the EU Member States, the BSEC Countries, regional and international organisations, representing the business community, academia, research centres, civil society organisations and policy-makers. The Agenda of the Conference is attached as ANNEX I.

The Conference lasted a full working day and was organised into two parts. The **first part** consisted of the welcome addresses, the keynote speech and the plenary session that included the presentation of the Black Sea Synergy Initiative and its best practices in blue growth, civil society and environment.

The **second part** consisted of four working groups that discussed the four fields of cooperation identified with some progress, i.e. culture and tourism, education, transport, energy, in order to overcome bottlenecks and maximize their potential.

The working groups were held in an interactive manner with targeted questions and discussions amongst moderators and participants. In order to facilitate the discussion, background information in the form of concept paper for each thematic working group were circulated prior to the Conference³.

In particular, the four working groups aimed:

- a) To **assess lessons learnt, opportunities & challenges**, as well as the level of engagement of all relevant stakeholders (government, industry, academia, civil society) in order to strengthen cooperation in these fields;
- b) To **identify and propose concrete ideas and projects** in each cooperation field, to be further pursued by regional stakeholders, in EU programmes and financial instruments, and/or in other national, regional, international funding mechanisms;
- c) To elaborate and **propose policy recommendations** to support a practical, result-oriented intra- and bi- regional cooperation.

The present paper includes the main results and recommendations of the four working groups. It could be of use to all interested stakeholders that aim to strengthen cooperation among the EU/MS and the non-EU Black Sea countries; to exploit the region's potential and to invest in research and innovation in the targeted thematic topics. The target audience includes *inter alia* policy making and policy delivery stakeholders, international organisations (EU, BSEC), national funding agencies, academia, industry, researchers, NGOs and civil society organisations.

D. Working Groups Results

1. Culture and Tourism⁴

The working group on culture and tourism attracted significant interest from the participants; approximately 45 persons participated in the session.

Discussions were both constructive and productive with regards to the strengths, challenges and opportunities the culture and tourism sectors present, and on which this present paper builds upon.

³ The concept papers for the four working groups are available here <http://www.icbss.org/index.php?pid=1079>

⁴ Mr. Stavros Kalognomos, Executive Secretary, Balkan and Black Sea Commission, Conference of Peripheral Maritime Regions (CPMR)

More precisely, participants exchanged on the EU policies for culture and tourism; the BSEC key priorities as defined by GOAL 8: Development of Tourism and Protection of Cultural Heritage of the BSEC Economic Agenda 'Towards an Enhanced BSEC Partnership'(2012); the UNWTO's Silk Road and Western Silk Road initiatives; the Cultural Routes of the Council of Europe.

It is worth noting also that the BSEC Organisation has two dedicated Working Groups on Cooperation in Tourism and on Culture that meet twice a year. The importance of cultural diplomacy as leverage in further cooperation and understanding between the actors and various stakeholders in the region is widely recognised.

Challenges

Despite being an emerging, flourishing economic sector for the Black Sea countries, the culture and tourism industry faces certain challenges that were acknowledged by almost all participants.

Participants argued that although culture and tourism are interlinked as economic sectors, they should not be combined in policy management, given their different nature in terms of products and services. Besides, as it was noted by many, culture encompasses an important element, that of cultural heritage that should be promoted and safeguarded both at local and regional levels.

It was noted that when it comes to the cultural and tourism sectors, as governance is exercised from regional to local level, local communities often feel isolated due to their limited access to policy-making mechanisms, related to funding and application of new technologies.

Additionally, participants underlined that access to, and exchange of data at regional level should be encouraged and improved. This would help to set up a more concrete and competitive regional planning to attract foreign tourists (not only from traditional markets but also emerging ones, such as China and India) and to support innovative endeavours, including start-ups.

A practical obstacle that should also be put into consideration is the visa restrictions that do not allow Black Sea citizens to easily visit and collaborate with each other. Visa facilitation would also encourage foreign tourists to visit the Black Sea Region and why not, combine travelling to more than one country.

Significant importance was also placed to the environmental challenges that affect negatively the cultural sites and are fuelled by the unregulated development of tourism industry in certain zones, i.e. coastal.

Strengths and opportunities

In the same context, participants acknowledged a number of strengths and opportunities that if addressed properly could reinforce the visibility, attraction and competitiveness of the Black Sea Region in culture and tourism.

In order to build an innovative and competitive "**Black Sea brand**", participants underlined the need for a common **regional action plan**, to reflect the needs of the region and how common priorities could be addressed and challenges could be tackled. This coordinated cooperation should aim at the protection and preservation of the Black Sea Region's cultural richness and diversity and at differentiated and tailor-made tourism products and services addressed to the existing and emerging markets interested in the region.

Among its main objectives should be: encouraging mobility, also through study visits; setting up a platform for creative and cultural industries, a sector that covers a wide range of activities and is mainly characterised by innovation; supporting accessibility and inclusion of all citizens, giving

access to groups of people as youth and women for instance to jobs and, therefore, alleviating challenges such as brain drain and gender inequalities.

In addition to this, special emphasis should be placed on capacity building and skills development actions. Such actions should aim at creating a favourable environment for the sustainable economic development of the culture and tourist industry by supporting youth entrepreneurship and cultural consciousness; adapting training programmes to meet market demands in the short and medium term; creating links for concrete cooperation among industry, academia and government.

Digitalisation of services was also identified as key priority of increasing importance in the near future.

Exchange of knowledge with other European regions is considered useful as Black Sea Region's stakeholders can benefit from lessons learnt and best practice acquired. This interaction contributes to driving forward an integrated regional planning approach that will allow the Region to better promote and preserve its rich cultural heritage as well as improve and diversify its tourism product addressed to a wider range of regional and international visitors.

Besides, as it was acknowledged by all participants, the role of joint projects is crucial in putting the political initiatives into practice, measuring their results and providing useful feedback for their improvement and further evolution.

BSEC's role in launching and funding calls for joint projects proposals at transnational level is commonly acknowledged and very welcome. A promising idea would be to support the gastronomic link between the Silk Road and the BSEC region. Other possible sectors that could be of priority to cultural and tourism cooperation were considered: festivals, folklore, music, dance.

Priorities – fields of cooperation

Building on the aforementioned considerations, a number of concrete steps are being set below for supporting cultural and tourism sectors advancements in the region:

- Assess the current state-of-the-art of the cultural and tourism sectors in the region, identifying best practice examples but also failures, highlighting lessons learnt and critical points to consider;
- Set up a prioritised list of actions for supporting sectors advancements taking however an integrated, territory-based approach, preserving and promoting the region's richness and diversity as well as its connection with existing and emerging markets;
- Assess current policy frameworks at Black Sea-regional and national level, and build upon the results of the aforementioned actions, better inform their update, integrate and stress out other important dimensions (i.e. tangible and intangible infrastructure resiliency, climate change adaptability);
- Undertake a benchmarking study and/or gap analysis drawing key insights from other regions of Europe and neighbouring to the Black Sea regions, and assess their transferability within the Black Sea Region, in relation to the aforementioned priorities and dimensions;
- Support competence-building activities for national and regional and local authorities developing a better understanding of competition characteristics and dynamics, as well as of the value of cooperation;

- Undertake awareness raising activities for promoting available mechanisms and funding opportunities that can be exploited for supporting advancements in the cultural and tourism sectors in the Black Sea Region;
- Support the introduction and wider integration of new technologies, also to traditional services and products, aiming to provide further efficiencies to the sectors;
- Reform educational and training programmes currently provided through different institutions within the region, considering emerging business trends and practice (i.e. establish better links between universities and vocational education and training institutions and the business sector).

2. Transport⁵

Taking into consideration (a) relevant policies, at EU⁶, regional⁷ and national level, supporting transport developments in the Black Sea Region, as well as its effective interconnection with Asian markets⁸, (b) advancements undertaken so far through various transport projects that have been implemented at national and regional level^{9,10}, (c) the needs of (intermodal) transport users¹¹, and (d) a number of priority projects that were identified at the national level for the transport sector¹², regional stakeholders had a very constructive and fruitful discussion with regard to the *strengths, challenges* and *opportunities* the transport sector presents in the Black Sea region, and on which this policy paper builds upon.

Considerations with regard to all transport modes were discussed, though the depth of the analysis varied for them. Road transport however attracted a greater attention, since most efforts and developments prove to have focused on enhancing road transport connectivity. Despite the latter, an integrated, regional planning approach with regard to road transport infrastructure proves still to be currently missing with the Black Sea Ring Highway serving as a notable example. Parts of the latter have been well-developed in certain countries but developments in several others prove to be stagnated, highlighting that road transport integration in the region is yet to be achieved, which impacts to a certain extent the region's trade competitiveness. Therefore, regional planning considerations should be efficiently integrated into national transport policies so that current infrastructure gaps can be effectively addressed. For supporting such a process, comprehensive evaluation frameworks that are endorsed by regional stakeholders, should be devised and promoted.

Such policies and frameworks should also pay great attention to and integrate within their context, issues of infrastructure resiliency and climate change adaptability since they are of utmost importance for ensuring sustainable development of the transport sector in the region.

⁵ Mr. Lefteris Sdoukopoulos, Associate Researcher, Hellenic Institute of Transport/Centre for Research Technology-Hellas (CERTH)

⁶ <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:52010DC0715&from=EN>

⁷ http://www.mfa.gov.tr/the-bsec-economic-agenda---towards-an-enhanced-bsec-partnership_-26-june-2012_-istanbul.en.mfa

⁸ https://eeas.europa.eu/sites/eeas/files/joint_communication_-_connecting_europe_and_asia_-_building_blocks_for_an_eu_strategy_2018-09-19.pdf

⁹ <https://transport.danube-region.eu/>

¹⁰ <http://www.bsec-organization.org/areas-of-cooperation/transport/reports>

¹¹ https://transport.danube-region.eu/wp-content/uploads/2019/09/Intermodal_Study_Danube_region2.pdf

¹² https://transport.danube-region.eu/wp-content/uploads/2019/09/EIB_Transport_Study_for_the_Danube_Macro-Region_ÖCö_Final_Report_D5_20170623_clean1.pdf.pdf

In this respect, benchmarking studies and gap analyses could provide the mean to draw valuable insights from other regions within and beyond the EU. Black Sea countries should better understand and deepen their knowledge on global competition characteristics and dynamics (e.g. implications of the One-Belt-One-Road initiative), thus better realize the multi-dimensional value enhanced cooperation can provide, following a regional, network approach. Within this process, it is particularly important that Black Sea countries are fully aware and exploit to the best possible extent all available mechanisms and funding programmes, believing in the different capacities those can provide and thus demonstrate the respective outcomes they become owners of. Progress achieved on certain aspects (e.g. advancements in digitalization such as the implementation of the BSEC permit system, etc.) should be further supported through targeted actions so that greater efficiencies can be realized into the system thus the introduction of other new technologies can be facilitated.

For better supporting the aforementioned lines of actions, specific attention should be also placed on the appropriate reform of available educational and training programmes in the region, so that the industry is being supplied with highly-skilled and qualified personnel. New trends and business practices should be taken into careful consideration, so that reskilling and upskilling activities can be better informed increasing in that way employment opportunities in the transport sector, thus supporting the further and faster growth of the latter. Besides industry actors, local authorities should also better understand the potential benefit to be derived from improved transport connectivity not only at the regional level but also at a corridor and network level. For transport corridors especially, stress points such as cross-border operations should also be carefully analysed and assessed for determining appropriate actions that can be deployed for reducing delays and increasing in that way the overall efficiency of the corridor(s) they are an integral part in.

With regard to the other modes as well as to intermodal transport, although less progress proves to have been achieved so far, important considerations were raised and insightful comments and ideas were provided for advancing developments in the region, supporting in that way better intermodal transport connectivity and the smoother integration of the different modes. More specifically, with regard to maritime transport, focus was provided on the structure and characteristics of the Ro-Ro network for assessing current inefficiencies and identifying solutions the implementation of which can contribute towards attracting a greater traffic in the region. For better supporting such a target, ports should also work on further enhancing their hinterland reach establishing better connections with inland intermodal terminals thus supporting, along with other actors, the development of efficient transport links between them. Furthermore, the region can also undertake an important role with regard to the bunkering of alternative marine fuels (i.e. LNG) considering the emission limits set by the IMO (i.e. the global sulphur cap 2020), which entered into force as of January 1st, 2020.

There are currently several studies analysing the development of an LNG network in South-East Europe and several investments are underway or have been planned. Black Sea countries can serve as an important part of the network, attracting relevant investments in its core ports. The latter should also further intensify their 'greening' efforts, adopting new technologies, upgrading their existing infrastructure and deploying different operational solutions for enhancing their environmental and energy performance, contributing towards 'greener' supply chains that prove to be providing a competitive advantage to all relevant actors involved.

Great attention should be also placed on the further exploitation of inland waterways for accommodating freight flows, changing in that way the current modal split in favour of more sustainable transport modes. In support of this target, the development of north-south and west-

east rail connections is also of increased importance while integration with Eurasian corridors should be also ensured (e.g. through the advancement of the Unified Rail Law). Last but not least, the wider exploitation of medium-sized airports in the region was also pointed out as a priority, since improving their connectivity can better support tourism, but also trade, promoting different travel offers and packages (e.g. city-break, etc.).

Priorities – fields of cooperation

Building upon the aforementioned considerations, a number of concrete steps are being set below for supporting sector advancements in the region:

- Assess the current state-of-the-art of the transport sector in the region, identifying best practice examples but also failures, highlighting lessons learnt and critical points to consider
- Set-up a prioritized list of actions for supporting sector advancements taking however an integrated, territory-based approach, looking at the region's interconnection with Asian markets as well as the different transport networks and corridors that have been developed or are currently under development
- Assess current transport policy frameworks at national and regional level, and building upon the results of the aforementioned actions, better inform their update, integrating also and stressing out other important dimensions (i.e. infrastructure resiliency, climate change adaptability)
- Undertake a benchmarking study and/or gap analysis drawing key insights from other regions and assessing their transferability within the Black Sea region, in relation to the aforementioned important dimensions
- Support competence-building activities for national and local authorities developing a better understanding of competition characteristics and dynamics, as well as of the value of cooperation
- Undertake awareness raising activities for promoting available mechanisms and funding opportunities that can be exploited for supporting advancements in the transport sector in the Black Sea region
- Support the introduction and wider integration of new technologies aiming to provide further efficiencies to the transport system
- Reform educational and training programs currently provided through different institutions within the region, considering emerging business trends and practices (i.e. establish better links between industry actors and educational and training providers at all different levels of the European Qualifications Framework).

3. Education¹³

The Black Sea region is facing major challenges with respect to achieving the transformative changes toward a sustainable future. Global and regional challenges, related to the Fourth Industrial revolution and Sustainable Development Goals require joint efforts, while key transformations needed to achieve the SDGs (based on the major drivers of societal change)

¹³ Mr. Anton Afanasyev, Senior Researcher, Southern Federal University

include human capacity, consumption and production, decarbonisation and the digital revolution. Although the balance of social, economic and environmental dimensions is required to ensure sustainable development, achievement of the latter is a societal rather than an environmental challenge; hence substantial advances in human capacity are needed, inter alia, through the improvement of education.

Challenges

Digital revolution necessitates modernization of approaches to education, that becomes one of the basic elements of addressing global and regional challenges, related to the development of Green, Blue and Digital economies, as well as achieving SDGs in the Black Sea region. The societal risks related to the internationalization of education at global and regional levels include commodification and commercialization of education programmes and the “brain drain” issue. Although, there has been an improvement in the internationalization of higher education in the Black Sea region, further development of academic and scientific mobility is still a priority, as well as the enhancement of exchange of information and best practices in the field of education.

One of the main challenges for the key stakeholders and policymakers dealing with the Black Sea Region is the lack of information exchange and limited availability of accurate reliable and comparable data (related to education, research and innovation, inter alia, marine and maritime data, which is one of the most developed areas of cooperation). This issue requires new, more effective strategies of dissemination of information and best practices in order to facilitate multilateral cooperation in the region.

Lack of official agreements on mutual recognition of qualifications and diplomas may hinder cooperation opportunities, especially in the multilateral format. Further modernization and unification of accreditation and certification processes, as well as exchange of the best practices in this field may be required. In some cases, different approaches to the university management may become the barrier to the development of joint projects.

Lack of funding and awareness of funding opportunities for bilateral and multilateral cooperation in the region also remain one of the key obstacles for further collaboration. Although there are some funding opportunities available for the development of joint projects in the field of education in the region, substantial number of the stakeholders either are not aware of them or find the application process overcomplicated (inter alia, due to the lack of knowledge on the specific issues of this process). The potential cooperation would benefit from increasing the availability of such information, as well as further simplification of application procedures and grants guidelines. In this regard, a series of relevant seminars/webinars or training programmes for interested regional parties might be conducted to increase awareness on existing funding opportunities and application process to facilitate development of joint projects.

Priorities – fields of cooperation

Education, science and innovation can be viewed as a tool to unlock the potential for blue growth in living resources, offshore renewable energy, tourism, culture, transport or seafloor hydrocarbons that underpin the blue economy of the region.

Regional stakeholders recognize the importance to encourage public-private partnerships in the field of education; support further interregional academic mobility, inter alia, through internships; ensure educational programmes meet regional market needs (implementing regional approach for the development of joint education programmes and curricula to address market needs);

encourage life-long learning and support relevant projects, including digital start-ups to increase universal accessibility of education; extend cooperation in the field of secondary education; promote women entrepreneurship through education and increase support for innovators, entrepreneurs, small and medium-size enterprises from Black Sea Region.

Promotion of the business-education and business-science initiatives and cooperation in the Black Sea Region requires the development and implementation of the relevant tools for multilateral cooperation. In this regard, accessibility of national and regional incubators and accelerators should be increased (for instance, certain national accelerators may include a specific quota for participants from the Region) to extend support of innovators, entrepreneurs, small companies and scientists. Further development of bilateral and multilateral projects within such initiatives will promote market-creating innovations that shape new markets and generate jobs, growth and higher standards of living in the region.

The Black Sea countries should harness the new opportunities for economic development, resilience and connectivity in the region and beyond, fostering prosperity and resilience in the Black Sea area. In this regard, cooperation with local communities, academic and business representatives should be significantly extended, as well as strengthening synergies between various funding instruments for sustainable regional development and encouraging investment and blending of funds for projects in the Black Sea region. It is imperative to determine impeding policies, reverse or modify them, and scale up recent advances that promote the Blue Growth and the SDGs.

There is a high potential for extending bilateral and multilateral cooperation in the Black Sea region in the following areas: ICT (Digital economy, Data science, Engineering), Tourism & culture (in particular, medical tourism, ecotourism, pescatourism, herbal medicine), Social sciences & psychology (in particular, art therapy and gender studies), as well as Agriculture and Environmental issues. Development of the abovementioned areas for the benefit of the people and the regional economy requires further improvement of human capacity and development of certain skill sets (in particular, entrepreneurial, digital, communication, language, international and soft skills). Joint educational projects and programmes in these areas may become the basis for further cooperation in the Region. Relevant projects can be supported, inter alia, by Erasmus+. There is a growing interest in implementation of the initiatives for the development of emotional intelligence and women entrepreneurship. Cooperation on the level of the entrepreneurial and career centres of the universities from the Region can be extended as well.

Further bi-regional and regional education, science and innovation policy dialogues and project development are required, including initiatives on the exchange of best practices in education. It is crucial to increase involvement of the key regional stakeholders (in particular, universities, business representatives, chambers of commerce, regional consortia and relevant ministries, working in the field of education), as well as regional and international organizations (inter alia, Black Sea Economic Cooperation Organization) to the dialogue and development of joint initiatives. In this regard theme-based regional conferences and contests may become the basis for extension of cooperation and future joint projects in the field of education.

4. Energy¹⁴

¹⁴ Mr. Shahmar Hajiyev, Leading Expert, Center of Analysis of International Relations (AIR Center)

The Black Sea region has a significant geopolitical aspect; one of the main concerns for the states is the concept of “energy security” and the ways to face and solve any challenges in this direction. Nowadays, the region faces challenges both in terms of energy security and connectivity. From a geopolitical standpoint to transit energy resources from producers to consumers via existing energy infrastructure or through new ones is a key aspect of energy security, which has an impact on the foreign policy of any state.

Regional states are important transit routes to supply European Union Member States with energy resources. To achieve sustainable development all states should develop “twin pillars” such as energy efficiency and renewable energy resources. The main questions are what kind of problems and energy security challenges facing the regional states, as well as what kind of perspectives of cooperation these states have? To answer these important questions, it should be noted that if regional states aim to achieve sustainable development, ensure energy security and become important transit energy hubs, they have to develop regional integration, energy infrastructure and invest in renewable energy sources.

Challenges and Opportunities

The region has huge potential to supply energy resources to European energy consumers by connecting the energy-rich regions of Caspian, Central Asian and Middle East regions. Taking into consideration that some of the Black Sea countries are EU Member States, the energy issue becomes very important. Key challenges are the following:

- High dependence on fossil fuels;
- Weak regional cooperation and inter-connectivity;
- Energy transit problems;
- Small state support for renewable energy sources and energy efficiency;
- Lack of information on how to achieve sustainable development in the energy sector;
- Interconnection of energy networks;
- Diversification of energy supplies and routes.

All countries, except Russia, are highly dependent on energy imports, and the Russian energy supplies are the main source of import. Therefore, high dependence on certain supply makes the countries vulnerable. In order to address the issue, countries should aim for diversification, and invest to clean energy.

The development of alternative energy resources is costly; it requires state support or private initiatives. Additionally, the development of alternative energy resources is the key way to reduce the growing demand for natural gas. The Black Sea countries should widen the cooperation in this direction, share experience and know-how to develop the renewable energy sector. Exchange of experts, academicians, and students between regional states could become an efficient tool for regional cooperation.

For instance, Georgia is promoting actively the use of renewables in the country. And the country is aiming to sell electricity as it will meet its full demand. Another important case may be that of Azerbaijan. The country has huge energy resources and exports its energy to the world energy markets. However, the country aims to develop the renewable energy sector, especially, wind and solar energy to achieve sustainable development.

It is important therefore, to assess the renewable energy sector in all countries; perform gap analysis and studies that could provide valuable results and recommendations both for the region and beyond.

Lack of funding for potential mutual projects among countries is another challenge. For example, the BSEC Organisation or national funding could support to certain extend funding opportunities for joint projects to promote regional cooperation, increase awareness and positively affect energy infrastructure issues.

Last but not least, the transit potential of countries is an outstanding issue. Countries such as Georgia, Greece, Turkey and Ukraine are important transit players to supply European energy consumers with natural gas. Russia is the giant energy producer and supplier to the European market. But problems in terms of secular supply and high dependence on the Russian gas, make EU Member States consider their energy security. Alternative energy sources are very important for diversification. New energy regions such as the Caspian Sea and Central Asia are attractive for the EU, thus, new energy projects are high on the agenda. The Southern Gas Corridor which targets to supply natural gas from Caspian to Europe will connect the gas supply of the Caspian basin to the European energy markets.

There are also nuclear security challenges in the wider Black Sea region as Ukraine and the Russian Federation are the main nuclear sites. Any conflict between these stakeholders may affect negatively both local and regional levels. The Russian-Ukrainian conflict led to an energy crisis in Europe and created security challenges around the Black Sea. It clearly illustrated that security of supply is questionable; therefore, more stable and alternative routes are highly important. The EU has supported various projects including the gas sources from the Caspian basin, and the new gas supplies will certainly consolidate the EU's position vis-à-vis Russia.

Besides, taking into account that Ukraine has still a weak system of nuclear security, sharing knowledge in the region may contribute to a better regional security system. In addition, cooperation and assistance between regional and non-regional nuclear stakeholders are the efficient way to be ready for any nuclear emergency in the region.

Priorities – fields of cooperation

The main segments of the trans-regional Southern Gas Corridor are almost completed to supply Europe with natural gas and it is clear that the Caspian states have a huge potential to contribute significantly to the energy security of Europe. The Trans-Anatolian Natural Gas Pipeline (“TANAP”) the Trans Adriatic Pipeline (“TAP”) will deliver Azeri gas from the Caspian Sea via Georgia, Turkey and Greece to the European natural gas market. This is very important in terms of regional cooperation and further integration. The countries such as Turkey, Greece, Bulgaria, and others will use these alternative energy sources. The Southern Gas Corridor clearly illustrates that the involved countries are playing a key role as transit countries, and regional connectivity is a key element to secular energy supply from producers to consumers.

LNG sources may play a crucial role in the diversification process. Energy import ration must be increased in the energy mix. States may increase the efficiency of the energy market by developing the grid of pipelines and regasification terminals all across the market. And such move will improve the energy market, and consequently, decrease dependence on few pipelines. The countries shall cooperate in this area and use the best practices. Especially, European countries have huge potential to develop this sector, and neighbouring countries must benefit from that.

Taking into account all the aforementioned, we can make the following recommendations;

- Analyze the energy sector of the Black Sea countries to develop the key concept of future cooperation, especially, in the alternative energy sector;
- Develop regional cooperation, mainly addressing the key challenges for the countries. Such cooperation can contribute towards stability, eliminate risks and support security environment in the Black Sea;
- Support information sharing and funding options for the joint projects;
- Awareness-raising for promoting energy efficiency and the use of renewable resources;
- Develop energy infrastructure and connectivity. In the case of energy interruption, countries will be able to help each other;
- LNG sources as diversification. Construction of LNG terminals will be an effective mechanism for energy security;
- And cooperation in the area of nuclear security to address the underlying danger of old nuclear power stations. In this regard, the EU should also take active measures to monitor and evaluate the situation and present reports to the states, addressing problems and threats.

5. Horizontal issues

The debate took also into consideration horizontal and cross-sectoral priorities, such as gender equality and environmental consciousness, which should be disregarded if we aim for sustainable result-oriented actions and policies in each sector.

- **Environmental consciousness:** Mitigating the effects of climate change and facilitating the use of environment-friendly practices in services and industry is a crucial challenge for the Black Sea region. Participants in all four working groups argued strongly in favour of the sustainable use of the region's natural resources for the well-being of societies. As it was highlighted, the development of unregulated practices in industry and services should be tackled by coordinated joint policies and actions, both at national and regional level.
- **Gender balance and social inclusion:** Policies, actions and/or proposals, should ensure the sustainable development of human resources by promoting gender equality and equal opportunities for all.
- **Bridging the industry-academia gap:** the effective commercialisation of research results and in particular their transformation into innovative products and processes is a key issue. Additionally, it was argued that stronger involvement of and engagement by policy makers and the civil society are crucial to achieve optimum results. Transfer knowledge from science to business and vice versa, as well as the need for more public-private partnerships was strongly emphasised.
- **Increase of funding opportunities targeting the region:** participants underlined the importance of providing more funding opportunities targeting the region with regards to research and development. Moreover, the lack of sufficient funds to support capacity building and entrepreneurship has resulted –among others- in brain drain and high numbers of youth unemployment. Public-private partnerships were again mentioned as a means of increasing funding resources.

- **Increase of coordinated action among the countries:** top-down, bottom-up and cross-sectoral coordinated cooperation, at regional (Black Sea countries), national and local (Local and Regional Authorities) levels is needed to avoid overlaps and duplication, for effective management and targeted results.

E. Next steps

Taking into consideration stakeholders' interest on the Black Sea Synergy Initiative and acknowledging the need to strengthen cooperation in these four cooperation fields, the ICBSS aims to undertake further actions to support result-oriented synergies.

A "**Black Sea Synergy: the way forward Action Plan**" will be developed by ICBSS, to continue the discussion and facilitate the cooperation among the Black Sea stakeholders and the EU with a view to addressing effectively the cooperation challenges and opportunities mentioned in the present policy paper.

The overall objective of the Action Plan will be on the one hand, to maintain the positive momentum of structural discussions between BSEC Member States – EU, and on the other hand, to support, through concrete actions, the implementation of the Black Sea Synergy Initiative at a mutually beneficial and project-oriented way.

About the authors

- **Anton AFANASYEV** (Dr.) is Senior researcher at the Southern Federal University; Authorized representative of the Rector of the Southern Federal University for international relations in the Black Sea region; Deputy co-chair of the Russian side of the Turkish-Russian Civic Forum's Committee on Science and Education; State expert in the BSEC Working Group on cooperation in Science and Technology and Working Group on Education.
- **Georgia CHANTZI** (Ms.) is Research and Policy Development Manager at the International Centre for Black Sea Studies (ICBSS).
- **Shahmar HAJIYEV** (Dr.) is Leading Expert at the Center of Analysis of International Relations (AIR Center)
- **Stavros KALOGNOMOS** (Mr.) is Executive Secretary of the Balkan and Black Sea Commission (BBSC) of the Conference of Peripheral Maritime Regions (CPMR); Coordinator of the Adriatic Ionian Network of Universities, Regions, Chambers of Commerce and Cities (AI-NURECC Initiative).
- **Lefteris SDOUKOPOULOS** (Mr.) is Associate Researcher at The Hellenic Institute of Transport (HIT) of the Centre for Research and Technology Hellas (CERTH).

ANNEX I



Regional Stakeholders Conference

Black Sea Synergy: the way forward

Thursday, 7 November 2019

Royal Olympic Hotel
Athens, Greece

Agenda

8.30 – 9.30	Registration
9.30 – 9.40	Opening Words
	Mr. Georgios MITRAKOS , Director General, International Centre for Black Sea Studies (ICBSS)
9.40 – 10.10	Welcome Address
	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- H.E. Amb. Michael B. CHRISTIDES, Secretary General, BSEC PERMIS- Ms. Ioanna EFTHYMIADOU, Minister Plenipotentiary B, Director B2 Directorate for Bilateral Economic Relations with Balkan, CIS & OCBS countries, Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Hellenic Republic- Mr. Alexandru ENE, Director for the Western Balkans and Regional Cooperation, Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Romania

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Ms. Julia TZEROVA, Head of Regional Cooperation Dept., Southeastern Europe Directorate, Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Bulgaria - Mr. Vassilis MARAGOS, Head of Unit Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus & Eastern Partnership, DG NEAR, European Commission
10.10 – 10.30	Keynote Speech
	Ms. Audrone PERKAUSKIENE , Head of Division Eastern Partnership, Regional Cooperation and OSCE, European External Action Service (EEAS)
10.30 – 11.45	Plenary Session. Black Sea Synergy Outlook
	<p>Moderator: Mr. Georgios MITRAKOS, Director General, International Centre for Black Sea Studies (ICBSS)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - EU's engagement to the Black Sea regional cooperation: the Black Sea Synergy initiative <i>Ms. Diana TASE</i>, Policy Officer for Black Sea Synergy and Eastern Partnership, Division Eastern Partnership, Regional Cooperation and OSCE, EEAS - Connect to Black Sea, Black Sea Blue Growth Initiative <i>Dr. Evangelos PAPATHANASSIOU & Ms. Ezgi SAHIN</i>, METU Institute of Marine Sciences - The Black Sea NGO Forum: Supporting civil society regional cooperation in the Black Sea area <i>Ms. Adela RUSU</i>, Executive Director, Romanian NGDO Platform – FOND - EMBLAS-Plus: Implementation of the EU marine and water policy in the Black Sea region <i>Dr. Jaroslav SLOBODNIK</i>, EU/UNDP EMBLAS-Plus Project Team Leader, Technical Coordinator of the Joint Danube Survey 4 <p style="text-align: center;">Q & A Session</p>
11.45 – 12.15	Coffee Break
12.15 – 13.30	Morning Parallel Working Groups
	<i>Format: The four working groups will be held in an interactive manner with targeted questions and discussions amongst moderators and participants in order to a) to assess lessons learnt, opportunities & challenges in each cooperation field; b) to identify and propose concrete ideas and projects that can be later pursued in funding mechanisms.</i>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Working Group 1. Culture & Tourism (concept paper) <p>Moderator: Mr. Stavros KALOGNOMOS, Executive Secretary, CPMR Balkan & Black Sea Commission</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Working Group 2. Transport (concept paper) <p>Moderator: Mr. Lefteris SDOUKOPOULOS, Associate Researcher, Hellenic Institute of Transport/Centre for Research Technology-Hellas (CERTH)</p>
13.30– 14.30	<i>Light lunch</i>
14.30 – 15.45	Afternoon Parallel Working Groups
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Working Group 3. Education (concept paper) <p>Moderator: Mr. Anton AFANASYEV, Senior Researcher, Southern Federal University</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Working Group 4. Energy (concept paper) <p>Moderator: Dr. Marika KARAGIANNI, Energy expert, University of Peloponnese, University of Thessaly</p>
15.45– 16.15	<i>Coffee Break</i>
16.15 – 17.15	Plenary Session. Results from WGs
	<p>Moderator: Ms. Georgia CHANTZI, Research Fellow, International Centre for Black Sea Studies (ICBSS)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - <i>Working Group 1. Culture & Tourism</i> - <i>Working Group 2. Transport</i> - <i>Working Group 3. Education</i> - <i>Working Group 4. Energy</i> <p style="text-align: center;"><i>Q & A Session</i></p>
17.15 – 17.30	Conclusions & Next Steps

Organised by: International Centre for Black Sea Studies (ICBSS)



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Building a Sustainable Future for the Black Sea Area

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