



PRESS RELEASE

Athens, 11 November 2019

## Regional Stakeholders Conference

# Black Sea Synergy: the way forward

The **International Centre for Black Sea Studies (ICBSS)** organized successfully the **Regional Stakeholders Conference “Black Sea Synergy: the way forward”** on **Thursday 7 November 2019**, at Royal Olympic Hotel, in Athens, Greece.

Following on the recent publication of the Joint Staff Working Document [‘Black Sea Synergy: review of a regional cooperation initiative – period 2015 -2018’](#), 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, as well as to highlight best practices and opportunities for synergies in the wider Black Sea region.

Opening the Conference, ICBSS Director General, **Mr. Georgios MITRAKOS**, highlighted the importance of the Black Sea Synergy initiative, as a valuable tool in building confidence in the wider Black Sea Region.

Welcome addresses were delivered by **H.E. Amb. Michael B. CHRISTIDES**, Secretary General of BSEC PERMIS; the Director of B2 Directorate for Bilateral Economic Relations with Balkan, CIS & OCBS countries of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Hellenic Republic, **Ms. Ioanna EFTHYMIADOU**, on behalf of the current Hellenic BSEC Chairmanship-in-Office; the Director for the Western Balkans and Regional Cooperation of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Romania, **Mr. Alexandru ENE**, representing the incoming Romanian BSEC Chairmanship-in-Office; **Ms. Julia TZEROVA**, Head of Regional Cooperation Dept. of the Southeastern Europe Directorate from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Bulgaria, on behalf of the preceding Bulgarian BSEC Chairmanship-in-Office; and on behalf of the co-organisers, **Mr. Vassilis MARAGOS**, Head of Unit Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus & Eastern Partnership, representing DG NEAR.

In her keynote speech, **Ms. Audrone PERKAUSKIENE**, Head of Division Eastern Partnership, Regional Cooperation and OSCE, European External Action Service (EEAS), stressed the significance of such timely events in promoting the EU – Black Sea cooperation in a practical and mutually beneficial way.

In the **first plenary session**, moderated by the ICBSS Director General, Mr. **Georgios Mitrakos** esteemed speakers presented the best practices of the Black Sea Synergy Initiative. In particular **Ms. Diana TASE**, Policy Officer for Black Sea Synergy and Eastern Partnership, Division Eastern Partnership, Regional Cooperation and OSCE, EEAS, provided an overview of the recent report on the Black Sea Synergy

2015-2018. Focusing on blue growth, on behalf of the METU Institute of Marine Sciences, **Dr. Evangelos PAPATHANASSIOU** and **Ms. Ezgi SAHIN** presented the recently launched Black Sea Strategic Research and Innovation Agenda (SRIA) and the new Black Sea CONNECT Project. **Ms. Adela RUSU**, Executive Director of the Romanian NGDO Platform – FOND, underlined the important role of the Black Sea NGO Forum in promoting civil society in the Region. Last but not least, **Dr. Jaroslav SLOBODNIK**, EU/UNDP EMBLAS-Plus Project Team Leader and Technical Coordinator of the Joint Danube Survey 4, offered significant insights related to the environmental protection and the recent scientific results concerning the Black Sea.

Special emphasis was placed on the four fields of cooperation identified with some progress, i.e. **culture and tourism, education, transport and energy**, through four thematic working groups. The working groups were held in an interactive manner with targeted questions and discussions amongst moderators and participants in order to assess lessons learnt, identify opportunities & challenges in each cooperation field and propose concrete project ideas.

Working Group 1 “Culture & Tourism” was moderated by **Mr. Stavros KALOGNOMOS**, Executive Secretary, CPMR Balkan & Black Sea Commission; Working Group 2 “Transport” was moderated by **Mr. Lefteris SDOUKOPOULOS**, Associate Researcher, Hellenic Institute of Transport/Centre for Research Technology-Hellas (CERTH); Working Group 3 “Education” was moderated by **Mr. Anton AFANASYEV**, Senior Researcher, Southern Federal University; Working Group 4 “Energy” was moderated by **Ms. Marika KARAGIANNI**, Energy expert, University of Peloponnese, University of Thessaly.

The results of the four WGs were presented briefly in the last plenary session, moderated by **Ms. Georgia CHANTZI**, ICBSS Research Fellow. The outcomes of the event will be presented in a policy paper by ICBSS in cooperation with the moderators, to be sent to the EU as a key deliverable from the Conference.

More than 90 regional stakeholders 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 had the unique opportunity to network, exchange views and shape future policies and actions for the wider Black Sea Region.

The event was organised within the framework of the Hellenic BSEC Chairmanship-in-Office and received co-funding by DG NEAR, within the framework of the ENI East Instrument.

Event photos are available on <https://photos.app.goo.gl/ttME6BCTagYY7vnx5>

For more information, please visit [www.icbss.org](http://www.icbss.org)

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**About the ICBSS:** The International Centre for Black Sea Studies (ICBSS) was founded in 1998 as a non-profit organisation. It has since fulfilled a dual function. On the one hand, it is an independent research and training institution focusing on the wider Black Sea region. On the other hand, it is a related body of the Organisation of the Black Sea Economic Cooperation (BSEC) and serves as its acknowledged think-tank. Thus, the ICBSS pursues applied, policy-oriented research, promotes knowledge on the Black Sea region both within and outside its boundaries, and offers policy advice with the aim of fostering multilateral cooperation among the BSEC member states as well as with their international partners.