

**THE BLACK SEA SYNERGY, AN EU INITIATIVE TO DEVELOP REGIONAL COOPERATION,
STRENGTHEN CIVIL SOCIETY AND CONTRIBUTE TO REGIONAL STABILITY**

(by Commissioner LEONARD ORBAN)

Dear Minister, Excellencies,

In the European Commission we are convinced that, in the aftermath of the August 2008 crisis between Russia and Georgia, we have to redouble our efforts to further develop European Union support to Black Sea Regional Cooperation involving all Black Sea countries and to encourage the active contribution by all stakeholders. The successful mediation role of the EU Presidency at the end of the August crisis shows the important leverage that the Union and its institutions have in the Region.

The Conclusions of the Extraordinary European Council of 1 September invite the Commission to explore ways of strengthening regional cooperation: The Commission should present proposals to develop the Eastern Partnership with our Eastern European neighbours participating in the European Neighbourhood Policy. At the same time the European Council confirmed the need for maintaining a clear commitment to carrying forward the Black Sea Synergy. In the Commission's view, there is ample space for both initiatives, which should become complementary and mutually supportive.

The Black Sea Synergy is a policy that:

- acknowledges that the Black Sea Region is of strategic importance for the EU
- states that the EU is part of the region and therefore it can and should contribute to regional cooperation
- demonstrates the EU's wish to support (with its experience and know-how) the development of cooperation between the other Black Sea actors and stakeholders in a whole range of sectors, promoting concrete projects, more coherence and better coordination.

The Black Sea Synergy is a truly regional, inclusive policy, open to cooperation with all our ENP partners as well as with other States, namely Turkey and with the Russian Federation, based on shared interests and responsibilities and a joint ownership.

The Commission adopted a Communication to the Council and the European Parliament on 19 June concerning the first year of implementation of Black Sea Synergy. It reveals the practical utility and the potential of this new EU regional policy approach. Experience in the first year also demonstrates that the development of EU-supported Black Sea regional cooperation is a process taking place in a complex environment. Continued progress requires the consistent and active involvement of a growing number of actors, including both Member States and other Black Sea partners, such as NGOs and other associations

The EU does not promote the creation of new institutions; there are already enough of them in this Region. We rather need more than ever flexibility and actions achieving effective results. The implementation of the Black sea Synergy should be channelled through the most appropriate structure in each case and in each sector. This could well be a particular State (member or not of the EU) or a group of them, the Organization of the Black Sea Economic Cooperation, the Black Sea Commission, regional and local initiatives.

Cross-border cooperation is one of the pillars on which the Black Sea Synergy is built. It supports civil society and people-to-people contacts as well as the development of regional and local authorities. For the period 2007-2013 there is an important financial envelope in the European Neighbourhood and Partnership Instrument to support Cross-Border cooperation. The Romania-Republic of Moldova-Ukraine Cross-Border Cooperation programme covers the north-western coast of the Black Sea with an allocation of € 126 million. Its implementation is about to start.

The European Commission has also set up a transnational Cross-border Cooperation programme throughout the Black Sea Region which will soon be materialized. A "Joint Operational Programme" has been drawn up by the parties (representing the national and regional authorities of 10 states). The first call for proposals will be published at the end of this year or beginning of 2009 as soon as the comments from all States concerned are taken into consideration. I want to praise the Romanian engagement in this Programme and the readiness to host its working structures.

The Black Sea Synergy has attracted considerable NGO interest. An alliance of 29 environmental NGOs met in Odessa in February and adopted a position paper on "Greening the Black Sea Synergy". Moreover, the first of a series of Black Sea Synergy civil society seminars on human rights issues took place in May 2008 in Chisinau. The event concentrated on freedom of expression in a civil society perspective. Participants included government officials and members of civil society from the Black Sea countries. The Seminar adopted solid recommendations to governments concerning freedom of expression.

Given the history of the region and its present challenges, civil society and local authorities should continue playing central role in the Black Synergy. Cooperation should go well beyond contacts between governments and capitals. Therefore the European Commission appreciates very highly the Black Sea Forum Initiative and this Civil Society Forum. We consider that the strengthening of civil society, its growing involvement into Black Sea regional cooperation is one of the main pillars of Black Sea Synergy.

Before concluding, in my capacity of Commissioner for multilingualism, let me underline the importance that I attach to the Black Sea regional cooperation in the area of higher education and academic mobility, which continues to be fostered through Erasmus Mundus. It increases the contacts amongst the younger generation by strengthening the multilingual intercultural dialogue in the Black Sea Region.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I consider that today's event represents an important contribution to the implementation of the Black Sea Synergy, being in line with our own proposals. As we go forward, we will increasingly need your ideas and your active contribution to maintain a frank and continuous dialogue based on clear and shared values to defend. It is with these thoughts that I wish this important event successful work.

Thank you very much.

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