



Conference

**The Black Sea Region:**

**Link between an Enlarged Europe and its New Neighbourhood**

15<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> October 2009

Bucharest, Marriott Hotel

– Summary –

The conference "*The Black Sea Region: Link between an Enlarged Europe and its New Neighbourhood*" was organized by the Austro-French Centre for Rapprochement in Europe and the French Institute for International Relations, in collaboration with the European Institute of Romania and with the support of the Commercial Bank of Romania/ERSTE. The event benefited from excellent contributions of high officials from European countries and representatives of the academic milieu.

The conference proposed to the participants topics related to the main geopolitical aspects of the regional cooperation, the identification of the foremost challenges of the cooperation in the Black Sea area, the specific topics of energy and environment – both of high relevance and also sensitive to the region, the economic and social context, the opportunities and vulnerabilities of the area and also the perspectives for further regional cooperation.

The debates naturally concentrated on the evolution of various recent cooperation initiatives in the Black Sea region, the complementarity or rivalry with the earlier ones and also on their general impact on the region's development.

The recent *Eastern Partnership* (EaP) initiative presented a high interest during the conference. A Polish-Swedish initiative, further on embraced by the whole European Union, the EaP was officially launched in May this year in Prague, setting-up a new cooperation framework between EU-27 and six Eastern European partner countries: Ukraine, Moldova, Azerbaijan, Armenia, Georgia and Belarus. The EaP advantages (such as the normative dimension, the Europeanization of the legal systems of the partner countries, the cooperation enshrined among the Eastern European states) were presented in contrast with its problematic aspects (such as the asymmetry in development and democratic performance, the frozen conflicts in the area, Russia's high and constant interest for the region).

A key element of the EaP remains the possibility of a partial integration of the Eastern partner states, the deep and comprehensive free trade agreements being at the core of the initiative. The fact that the EaP expresses that third parties are invited to the projects do not exclude further *rapprochement* from Turkey or Russia.

The question of potential rivalry was raised mainly in relation to the Black Sea Synergy, the Eastern Partnership and the future Danube Strategy. Countries behind these initiatives being very sensitive in making their own initiative a priority for the EU, recommendations were made to create different policies, for the very different expectations of the countries in the area, to apply the conditionality principles and EU to prepare concrete projects and to transform itself into a driving force in the region (A. Balcer).

Some of the speakers have stressed the *partnership idea*, not the competition among the initiatives in the area and a suggestion was made that the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP), which at first focused mostly upon a bilateral system, should take into account all these regional initiatives (J. Blanc).

*Romania's position* regarding the EU's initiatives towards its neighbours is today very clear: encouraging the democratisation, stabilisation and Europeanization process through enlargement and integration in the Western Balkans area, but also in the Eastern area -where there is a vocation for this process. Romania had a special contribution in developing an EU strategy for Black Sea. The initial competition between the Black Sea Synergy and the EaP was overcome and Romania considers them to be *complementary initiatives*, becoming compulsory to have a good resources' division between those two for further improvement. The Romanian Parliament supports the involvement of the NGOs sector in both initiatives. The cooperation with Moldova and Ukraine are two projects of strategic importance for Romania and should be treated as such. The Partnership Romania signed recently with Poland and the one under negotiation with Turkey complete the latest bilateral framework. Romania pleads constantly for an increased EU presence and involvement in the area. (T. Corlăţean).

The conference highlighted the significance of the *frozen conflicts*. Be they now called unsolved conflicts or frozen conflicts, they put under pressure and under constant alert both the countries in the region, and also the European community. The experience of last year in Georgia is a perfect reminder that these conflicts have a high potential of shaking up the regional stability.

*Energy* is progressively linked to the concepts of national security and environment and climate change. EU has taken the lead in energy efficiency. Although the concept *energy security* is not very well defined; it is an instrument of power politics. Energy debate generally focuses on oil and gas, though there is an increased interest now in new technologies, nuclear energy and so on. In the Black Sea region, there is too much emphasis on the pipelines routes. There is a strong recommendation for EU to develop one strategy for energy security (S.Celac).

Among the long-discussed routes and pipelines, *Nabucco* project represented a declared priority for the EU. Regarding this project, an inter-governmental agreement was signed on 13 July this year in Ankara. Romania has undertaken diplomatic efforts to producer countries in Caspian Sea (Azerbaijan, Turkmenistan, Kazakhstan) to develop economic/energy partnerships; and it promotes energy cooperation in Black Sea area [Black Sea Economic Cooperation (BSEC) dialogue, pragmatic cooperation with Russia, Georgia, Strategic partnership with Turkey]. Given that both EaP and the Black Sea Synergy encompass energy components, it should be strengthened the overall support for EU policies dedicated to Caucasus and Central Asia. (M. Harbiuc)

Part of the ENP framework, the *Joint Operational Programme Black Sea 2007-2013* was launched in 2009, among regions from ten countries. Around 17 million euros are allocated from the European Neighbourhood and Partnership Instrument (ENPI), for a period of seven years. Comprising 90% EU co-financing and 10% national co-financing, this programme is based upon the joint partnership principle. Requiring a minimum one organisation from a Member State, and one organisation from a non-member state, the programmes go from 50,000 euros to 700,000 euros, and the projects last from 12 to 24 months. The Joint Management Authority for this programme was designated within the Romanian Ministry of Regional Development and Housing. The first call for proposals had as deadline 12 October 2009, the end of evaluation and selection of projects is projected for January 2010 and the first grant contracts will be concluded by March 2010. (S. Canea).

The *Black Sea Euroregion* initiative was signed by Romania in 2006. The technical Secretariat is hosted by the City Council Constanța. This initiative intends to give an enhanced role to the *local communities* (from Armenia, Bulgaria, Georgia, Republic of Moldova and Romania) for cooperation projects' development in the area. Investments are expected in tourism, cultural traditions, environment protection etc. The rather low level of communication between the local and central bodies and the difficulty to identify common needs for different states in diverse areas: economic, social, given also the poor infrastructure in the region and different concepts of EU Member State versus non-EU Member-State lead to the impression that sometimes cooperation stops to papers (S. Sumanariu).

Given the risk of overlapping of these regional initiatives, it should be a real matter of concern how to assure the synergy among them. The main challenge is considered to be the lack of information, so one of the solutions would be to establish a permanent channel of communication and somehow to put all these initiatives together. The Black Sea Synergy initiative should assure the *coherence* among all these regional initiatives, but so far it failed to express the concrete mechanisms to reach this kind of coherence (S.Canea).

At the same time, it was quite strongly settled that the legitimacy of the functional projects in the Mediterranean Sea, in the Baltic Sea could also be exported to the Black Sea. (E. Dupuy).

*The Black Sea Economic Cooperation* (BSEC) represented an important step in the evolution of the cooperation blueprint in this area. In its 17 years of existence, BSEC concentrated mainly upon the economic aspects of the cooperation. So far BSEC has not used its potential in an optimal way. Given several political conflicts between member states, the low efficiency in some of the working groups, BSEC remains a rather unexploited framework for dialogue, however a good platform of preparation for more ambitious projects (T. Chebeleu).

The conference benefited from a thorough *OECD analysis* and statistics for the region, emphasizing the importance of trust-building in the region. It is vital to know the comparative advantages of the region in order to be able to attract investors, an analysis of sector competitiveness being the key to further involvement in the area. OECD cooperates extensively with both initiatives, EaP and BSEC (F. Farra).

Reference was also made to the present international financial and economic *crisis*, which affected negatively the wider Black Sea region, reducing the number of foreign investments, holding the exports and impeding further rapid developments. The aspects of *poverty* and *discrepancies* in the region were emphasized.

Strong arguments were presented in favour of *social partnerships* in the region. A good example, given by *Austrian experience*, was extensively presented. The permanent collaboration relationship among the employers and the employees, and also with the government should always rely upon a solid legal framework.

Comments upon the *migration and asylum* procedures in EU, and the increased interest for this field in Romania were also made during the conference. Migration and asylum are key interest points for the Black Sea region. Romania's role as an external border of EU was also under discussion, the increased measures and interest in managing the migration flows, the creation of the centers for the refugees and also the continuous update of Romania's legislation, in parallel with the major role played by the UNCHR were only some of the specific topics discussed upon (C. Bunea).

A new initiative forwarded by Austria and Romania to the EU recommends the setting up of a *Strategy for the Danube region*. This year the ministries for foreign affairs of the two countries supported and forwarded successfully this idea to the European Council and there is a promise that the European Commission will deliver an EU Strategy for the Danube region by the end of 2010. During the Hungarian Presidency of the EU in 2011, this strategy should be endorsed and adopted at the highest level. Given the heterogeneity of the countries involved: EU Member States, candidate states, non-EU Member States, it will be a real challenge for the EU to come up with a proper solution, in terms of projects, financial instruments and work mechanisms. The focus will certainly be upon the transportation system, tourism potential, and environment protection.

This new project on Danube is not intended to be or evolve into a new strategy in the Black Sea region or to reshape some existing strategies, but it can certainly draw some lessons from the Baltic Sea Strategy (a successful project based also on the European public consultation) and from the Black Sea Synergy (a defined cooperation framework, still awaiting for concrete results).

The *EU's role in the Black Sea region* derives from its own interests in the area: economic (energy, markets, investments), political (ENP, enlargement and EaP) and strategic interests. The EU could be the 'honest-broker' - a neutral, powerful actor in the region - with new methods of involvement at its disposal, also with available financial sources, and even with the prospect of increasing these funds, if the results prove to be satisfactory. The traditional concerns (to develop transport, trade relations) may be very well combined with the newer interests in the Black Sea's potential as a link to the Caspian Sea and Central Asia, the establishment of energy routes (S. Tinca).

The conference conclusions revealed the actuality of the Black Sea cooperation initiatives topic. All the partners should maintain and further strengthen the open cooperation principle that would lead to economic and social progress in the region (P. Jankowitsch).

Debates also led to the necessity and promise to carry on the fruitful dialogue on the Black Sea initiatives within the EU new cooperation frameworks. It will be interesting to see if the expressed wish and need for more communication in the area, mostly at the practical level among the existing initiatives, will become a reality, so that the large number of projects and strategies in the Black Sea region might not turn out to be an obstacle, but an incentive factor for the region's development as a whole and for the stability and security purpose.

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