



# SÜDOSTEUROPA- GESELLSCHAFT

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EU and Black Sea Regional Cooperation  
Common goals  
Common interests**

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The Black Sea region has always been an important region for Europe – at a crossroads from North to South, from East to West. Being at such a crossroads has meant that that the region has seen it's share of conflict and confrontation in history, but it has also been a region for contacts and co-operation.

With the recent rounds of enlargement in 2004 and at the beginning of this year, the Black Sea region has also become more and more important for the European Union. This has taken the EU a while to realise, but the development of the European Neighbourhood Policy was an important first step in acknowledging this.

Last month, the European Commission took another step with its Communication on a 'Black Sea Synergy – a New Regional Co-operation initiative'. This initiative, as well as the strong focus the German EU Presidency has put on the EU's relationship with its Eastern neighbours is highly commendable.

The EU needs to realise that it has a strong self-interest in enhancing its relations with this region. This goes far beyond the interest in having a stable neighbourhood environment for the EU.

The fact that the Black Sea region is at a crossroads also implies that much of what ends up in the EU comes through this region. Energy is what comes to mind first and is of course one of the pre-occupations of the EU. But just as important are issues of organised crime, trafficking of human beings, drugs etc. And, on a more positive note, of course, the EU is always looking at opening up new markets.

So we should not see the relationship between the EU and the Black Sea region as being one-sided.

Furthermore, these relations should not be focused – or even dominated – by the relations the EU has to cultivate with Russia.

Nor can the EU allow its relationship to the region be dominated by its relationship with Turkey, which is on one side much closer – with Turkey actually in accession negotiations – but also rather problematic.

The EU has much to gain from closer relationships with the Black Sea region and – even though EU membership cannot and should not be discussed at the moment – it also has much to offer below the threshold of membership. Closer relationships offered as part of the European Neighbourhood Policy are important steps and need to be filled with life.

But up to now the regional dimension of the Neighbourhood Policy has been neglected. The new 'Black Sea Synergy' finally fills this gap and I am very glad for the opportunity that this conference provides to discuss further this Synergy as well as experiences with regional co-operation in other areas, in particular of course South Eastern Europe, since this is my area of expertise.

Allow me to talk a little about South Eastern Europe and the work of the Stability Pact in enhancing regional co-operation in this region, while recognising of course that there are many important differences between South Eastern Europe and the Black Sea region. The most important difference being that all the countries of South Eastern Europe are either already EU member states or have the clear perspective of becoming members.

Regional co-operation in South Eastern Europe has been – and is – of importance and benefit to the region for a number of different reasons. And while there was little understanding for the need to co-operate on a regional basis only a few years ago, today the concept of regional co-operation is firmly anchored in the policies of the region.

Regional co-operation is essential, because many of the challenges the governments face are of a regional – not a national – nature. They can only be addressed jointly. To name just two very obvious examples, the fight against organised crime and attracting investment – investors will not be interested in the often small national markets, but a regional market such as the one created by the new CEFTA 2006 (26 million consumers) is certainly much more attractive.

Regional co-operation is also an essential training ground in these times of globalisation. More and more spheres of life and politics cannot be decided on the national level, but must be dealt with in multi-lateral environments. Being able to successfully interact in such an environment – and this does not just apply to the EU – requires a lot of experience and practice; practice, which can be gained on the regional level to great benefit.

In addition to that, regional co-operation and good-neighbourly relations are also a condition for EU membership. This has certainly been an important driving force for co-operation in South Eastern Europe, but this is of course where the two regions differ in their EU perspectives.

But considering the fact that both South Eastern Europe and the Black Sea region have seen a number of violent conflicts in the recent past, I would also like to highlight another important aspect of regional co-operation: it is often much easier to address bilateral issues in a regional

context. Even with rhetoric flying high between Belgrade and Pristina regarding Kosovo, it has been possible to fully integrate Kosovo into regional processes. And this seems to be the case in the Black Sea region as well, if I look at the Black Sea Economic Co-operation Organisation (BSEC), where Armenia and Azerbaijan are sitting together just as Armenia and Turkey, even if the latter two do not even have diplomatic relations.

Similarly, working on concrete thematic issues, where all parties have something to gain, is of course much easier. There is a lot to be said for staying away from difficult political issues and focusing on technical co-operation as a means of confidence building. This can later on provide the basis for more ambitious efforts.

Let me end with a few concrete examples of regional co-operation processes in the framework of the Stability Pact, which could be of interest for similar efforts in the Black Sea region.

**Trade and Investment:** As already mentioned, this is an area where the need to co-operate on a regional level is quite clear. Initially the South East European countries felt that a multilateral trade agreement would be too intrusive and thus decided on a network of bilateral agreements, which of course would be an option in the Black Sea region as well. Ultimately of course the decision was made to move towards an expansion and modernisation of CEFTA after all.

But there are a number of other aspects, which should be looked at in this context. The OECD developed an Investment Compact for South Eastern Europe in the context of the Stability Pact. The aim is to improve the investment climate in the different countries. Expertise was made available from the OECD, but the instrument that proved to be by far the most efficient was peer pressure – if you see your neighbour moving ahead faster in the reform process, this is the best incentive to increase your own efforts as well.

In addition, allow me to add a very practical measure. The best trade agreement will not have any results, if the trucks are blocked at inefficient border stations. The World Bank has put together an extremely important project called TTFSE – Trade and Transport Facilitation in South Eastern Europe. This project aims to ensure the practical steps are taken, so that trade can actually take place.

**Energy:** The Energy Community Treaty was an important step in creating an integrated energy market between the EU and South Eastern Europe. Moldova and Ukraine have already asked to become members of the treaty, but there are of course certain technical aspects, which need to be observed and addressed. But apart from that, energy is certainly an issue, where closer co-operation between the Black Sea countries is essential and also in the interest

of the EU.

Fighting Organised Crime: I have already mentioned this topic. This issue clearly requires regional co-operation and this is true on a number of levels – between police forces, between customs, between prosecutors etc. In South Eastern Europe a number of co-operative efforts have been made in this respect. The SECI Transborder Crime Fighting Centre brings together Police and Customs Officers from all countries. SEPCA, the South East European Police Chiefs Association has just decided to further enhance its co-operation by establishing a joint Secretariat. SEEPAG, the South East European Prosecutors Advisory Group is active on the level of Prosecutors. These efforts should certainly be looked at carefully also for the Black Sea region.

Parliamentary Co-operation: It is important that not just governments co-operate. Co-operation between parliaments has a lot of potential in building capacities and confidence building. Networking of this kind is crucial.

Let me end on a very practical issue: Disaster preparedness and prevention. This is an issue all our countries are faced with. In many cases, cross-border co-operation in emergency situations can save lives – but requires the necessary mechanisms to be in place. With a rather simple network linking up the responsible institutions in each of the countries much can be achieved.

And if you think about the earthquakes in Turkey and Greece a few years ago and the mutual assistance that was given – technical co-operation like this can have a very political impact and facilitate confidence building and mutual understanding.