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**EU and Turkish Perspectives on Black Sea Regional Cooperation**

**Statement by Gernot Erler,**

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Ambassador Kuneralp,  
Excellencies,  
Dear colleagues,  
Ladies and Gentlemen!

It's a great privilege for me to bid a very warm welcome to all of you also on behalf of the Southeast Europe Association and to open up today's conference, which we have devoted to "Turkey and the Black Sea Regional Cooperation". This conference is, I am convinced, particularly important and timely. I need not recall what an important partner Turkey is for us. And the Black Sea Region, on the other hand, is developing dynamically and constantly gaining importance.

It was, in my view, one of the better initiatives by the German EU Presidency to bring more focus and coherence to this central area of the EU's Neighbourhood Policy, and I am glad to see that the German idea has caught on not only with the following Presidencies, but also with the countries of the region.

#### *Black Sea Synergy*

The Black Sea region had been covered by different EU policies: the European Neighbourhood Policy, the partnership with Russia and Turkey as well as cooperation in the area of Common Foreign and Security Policy.

On the initiative of the German presidency, the EU entered into in-depth discussions about the development of a strengthened and coherent EU engagement towards the region. In cooperation with the Commission and our EU partners, we developed the concept known as "Black Sea Synergy".

It was and is our aim to give a regional dimension to our policies towards individual Black Sea states and to promote regional cooperation around the Black Sea, together with our partners in the region.

The Black Sea Synergy brings together in a focused manner the EU's contribution for fostering stability and peaceful development in its immediate neighbourhood. It aims at enhancing mutual trust and close cross-border cooperation. Almost needless to say – what it needs more than anything is the active interest and commitment by the Black Sea countries themselves. It is designed to assist and is directed against no State's interests. I am glad to say that this is well understood all around the Black Sea – a body of water that should, in our vision, not separate but unite the countries around it and beyond.

In February this year, a Meeting of Foreign Ministers' took place in Kiev, involving all regional partners, the EU Member States and the EU institutions. The participation by the German Foreign Minister Steinmeier highlighted the great importance Germany in particular attaches to the Black Sea region. The Joint Statement adopted by the Meeting identified concrete fields requiring action at regional level include energy, transport, communication, trade, environment, maritime policies, fisheries, migration, law enforcement and the fight against organised crime. During the meeting, a large number of proposals for projects were also made. We will now need to implement these ideas and begin practical work!

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Both the European Football Championship in Poland and Ukraine and the Winter Olympics in Sochi offer us unique opportunities to strengthen our relations and cooperation by building up the trans-European networks as a contribution to improve the infrastructure connecting us. We look forward to working with our partners around the Black Sea to further elaborate these proposals, and put them into practice.

I am therefore looking forward to the results of the progress report on the implementation of the Black Sea Synergy Initiative – which should be presented toward the end of June. And I am confident that this report will provide an important new step – moving from concepts to practical results.

It is indispensable that the EU-Black Sea Synergy is fully inclusive and involves all

countries of the region, in particular Turkey. To say it more clearly: Turkey is key for any kind of cooperation in the region. I would therefore like to say now a few words on how I see the role of Turkey in the Black Sea Cooperation.

*Turkey as leadership nation of BSEC and security partner in the region.*

Turkey has been a crucial security partner for more than 50 years. It has been a member of NATO since 1952, is a founding member of the Council of Europe (1949) and of the CSCE/OSCE (1975). In addition, Turkey assumed an indispensable leadership role in the formation of the Black Sea Economic Co-operation (BSEC).

The end of the 1980s and the beginning of the 1990s was a period of historical changes that overcame the division of Europe and made Europe a much better and more peaceful continent. But the momentous political forces at work also were a serious challenge, requiring creative foreign policy thinking and sometimes deft and decisive handling.

Turkey met this challenge, inter alia, by initiating the development of stronger economic ties and defining joint interests among countries around the Black Sea.

Today, Turkey and the EU both join in pursuing this important task – and, I am convinced, will be key in producing the synergy that lies at the heart of what we want to achieve.

*Energy*

With a rapidly growing economy, Turkey has become one of the fastest growing energy markets in the world.

Turkey is geographically located in close proximity to 71.8% of the world's proven gas and 72.7% of oil reserves, in particular those in the Middle East and the Caspian basin. It thus forms a natural energy bridge between the energy producers and the energy consumers. It ensures energy security through diversification of supply sources and routes, considerations that have gained increased significance in Europe today.

Major pipeline projects realized and others under construction, which will inevitably contribute to Europe's energy supply security, are enhancing Turkey's role as an important transit country on the Eurasia energy axis and energy hub in the region.

To this end, Turkey has concentrated its efforts for the transportation of Caspian oil and gas reserves to Western markets, in other words on the realisation of the East-West Energy Corridor, often referred to as the Silk Road of the 21st Century. The pipeline projects linking the Caucasus and Central Asia to Europe will be essential for the region's integration with the West. Secure and commercially profitable pipelines will help bring stability and prosperity to the region.

In the spheres of renewable energies and energy efficiency, but also in the environmental field, we see great additional opportunities for further, mutually beneficial cooperation.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I look forward to a conference with vivid and fruitful discussions. And let me express my deep gratitude to our partners in the preparation of this event, as

- the Association of Turkish Industrialists and Entrepreneurs (TÜSIAD): for the cooperation and support,
- the Union of Black Sea and Caspian Confederation of Enterprises (UBCEE) for support, and
- the German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ) for support.

Thank you!