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

**REGIONAL COOPERATION FOR THE PROTECTION  
OF BLACK SEA COASTAL AND MARINE ENVIRONMENT**

by

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Dear Mr. Minister,

Your Excellency,

Dear Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is a great pleasure and an honor for me to deliver a talk to such distinguished guests about the Black Sea environment. On behalf of the Black Sea Commission, I would like to take this opportunity to express my gratitude to the *Southeast Europe Association* and *TUSIAD*, the organizers of this conference. I also thank Mr Gernot Erler, *Minister of State at the German Federal Foreign Office* for inviting me to this meeting.

Although I am a Turkish citizen myself, I should stress that I am not representing Turkey here, but the Black Sea Commission.

The title of my talk this evening is “***Regional Cooperation for the Protection of the Black Sea Coastal and Marine Environment***”. Since the major emphasis in this meeting is towards “Turkey and Black Sea Regional Cooperation”, I will make specific references about Turkish efforts.

The content of my talk will include the following:

- 1) The Black Sea and its ecosystem
- 2) The legal framework: Bucharest Convention and the Black Sea Commission
- 3) The role of Turkey in the BSC activities
- 4) Pressing Issues and Potential Projects in the region
- 5) Concluding Remarks

### **The Black Sea and its ecosystem**

The Black Sea is one of the most interesting seas in the world due to many aspects; e.g. geological, hydrological, anthropogenic, political and historical. Its entire history is full of dramatic events.

Perhaps firstly I should tell you that it is probably the youngest sea in the world. Only 4-5 thousand years before the birth of Jesus, the Black Sea was a freshwater lake, when Mediterranean waters started to invade its basin through the Istanbul strait. Because of the massive flow, some scientists claim that Noah's Flood took place in the Black Sea.<sup>1</sup>

Since Mediterranean waters are more saline and much denser, they accumulated at the lower section of the water column. Because of the immense depth of the Black Sea (its average depth is 2 km), such a density difference prevented aeration of deep waters. Thus, the Black Sea contains the largest volume of permanently anoxic waters in the world.

However, the thin oxygenated layer of surface waters of the Black Sea are very fertile and sustain a rich fishery. In fact, its total fish production is equal to that of the entire Mediterranean, despite being 3 times smaller in size.

### **The Legal Framework: Bucharest Convention and the Black Sea Commission**

The sustainable use of natural resources whilst protecting the sensitive ecosystem is of utmost importance for the Black Sea coastal countries. This was a driving force for the signing of the *Convention on the Protection of the Black Sea Against Pollution* (the Bucharest Convention), the first regional environmental agreement among the 6 riparian countries: Bulgaria, Georgia, Romania, Russian Federation, Turkey and Ukraine. Later in 1996, Contracting Parties of the Convention adopted the *Strategic Action Plan for the Rehabilitation and Protection of the Black Sea* which sets out the strategic targets and outputs for protecting the environment. The Convention has 3 integrated protocols for dealing with the specifics of (1) Land-based Pollution, (2) Emergency at sea, and (3) Dumping in the sea. There is also a Biodiversity Protocol, signed in 2002 that has yet to be ratified in some countries.

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<sup>1</sup> Ryan & Pitman, 1998

The Black Sea Commission (BSC) through its Permanent Secretariat is the regional body responsible for the implementation of the Bucharest Convention, since its establishment in the year 2000. All environmental aspects of coastal and marine protection are dealt by the BSC through its well established structure that includes “Advisory Groups” and “Activity centres”. These are grouped into the following thematic subjects:

- Information and Data Exchange*
- Pollution Monitoring and Assessment*
- Integrated Coastal Zone Management*
- Conservation of Biological Diversity*
- Environmental Aspects of Management of Fisheries and other Marine Living Resources*
- Environmental Safety Aspects of Shipping*
- Control of Pollution from Land Based Sources*

The activity center for the “Control of Pollution from Land Based Sources” is in Turkey.

### **The Role of Turkey in the BSC activities**

This activity center has contributed substantially to the revision of the protocol on Land-based sources and activities.

Apart from its active involvement in the LBSA revision, Turkey has fully committed itself to the implementation of the Convention and the Strategic Action Plan and has actively supported the work of the Commission and its institutions.

Turkey provides valuable input to the operations of the Black Sea Commission by hosting the Permanent Secretariat of the BSC in Istanbul. For this purpose the Government of Turkey allocated a historical building for the Permanent Secretariat in the grounds of the famous Dolmabahçe Palace. Furthermore Turkey covered 45% of the budget of the Commission for the first three years of operation of the Secretariat. In the next few years, the Global Environmental Facility (GEF), through the Black Sea Ecosystems Recovery Project, sup-

ported the institutions and activities of the Black Sea Commission. With the phasing out of the GEF project now, Turkey agreed on additional voluntary contribution, amounting to about half of the total budget of the Commission, to keep the activities going on.

In September 2007, Turkey, jointly with Black Sea Commission and the Oil Spill Preparedness Initiative (OSPRI), successfully undertook the first regional exercise for accidental oil spill. The specific preparations for the Exercise SULH extended over nine months and incorporated a series of technical workshops, seminars and planning meetings<sup>2</sup>. Over 250 people took part in the exercise during three days. The exercise included deployments of Turkish resources and equipment brought from the Russian Federation and Romania. This event represented a major milestone and investment in the region's preparedness to combat emergency situations.

In line with Turkey's accession process to the EU, much effort is made on behalf of Turkey to improve and introduce new legislation and approaches in the field of marine environment. This has provided further impetus for the activities of the Black Sea Commission.

I would like to say a few words about the role of the EC in the Black Sea. The European Commission has initially provided substantial support to the Black Sea Environmental Program during 1992 – 1999. Since the establishment of the Permanent Secretariat, it has provided additional support to its activities, including through DABLAS Task Force.

Now that Bulgaria and Romania have joined the EU, the Black Sea has become an EU sea. The need to address marine environment problems at regional level is well recognized by the EU Marine Strategy Directive adopted by the European Commission.

This brings me to the next section of my talk.

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<sup>2</sup> Taylor & Velikova 2008

## **Pressing Issues and Potential Projects in the region**

As results of Transboundary Diagnostic Analyses show, the major environmental problems in the Black Sea are transboundary. One or two countries' efforts alone will never be sufficient to protect the Black Sea ecosystem, or even their own exclusive economic zone.

The strong, basin scale anticlockwise currents in the Black Sea transport any kind of pollution from one region to all other regions. This pollution could be nutrients (e.g. as in the case of the Danube river impact to the entire ecosystem), marine litter, or oil pollution. Not only pollution but also invasive species could be easily transported from one region to another. Indeed, the Black Sea is one of the worst affected marine regions of the world impacted by the ship-mediated transfer of invasive species. Therefore, transboundary problems require basin wide actions.

The Working Group on Environment, during the previous conference (*“EU and Black Sea Regional Cooperation”*, 7-8 May 2007), highlighted a set of concrete projects. Now, I would like to bring to your attention from that list those related to shipping and fisheries. I should point out that Turkey is the key partner for the successful conclusion of these two issues:

There has been a substantial increase in the amount of oil and other goods transported through the Black Sea and Turkish Straits over the past decade. The increase in shipping traffic, amplified with the transport of Caspian oil, creates a potential risk for oil spills or other hazardous material in the Black Sea. Shipping accidents may occur due to collision. To decrease the risk of collision, an Automatic Identification System (AIS) is used in commercial vessels that enable ships to see each other in any weather or light conditions. However, fishing vessels do not have this system and there is a higher risk of collision between a commercial vessel and a fishing vessel. In the past, there were some reported cases of such collisions in the Black Sea. Turkey is now planning to gear fishing vessels also with AIS equipment. Extending such technology to the entire region, by using Turkish experi-

ence, will be very beneficial to increase the safety of shipping and environmental security in the Black Sea.

The second issue is directly related to the fishery management. As I have mentioned at the start, the Black Sea supports a rich in fishery with landings of around half a million ton annually. There is a striking imbalance amongst the fish catches of the Black Sea coastal countries. Whilst Turkey catches about 80% of total landings, the other five countries share the remaining 20%. Many fish stocks in the Black Sea are migratory and hence transboundary. Therefore, one country's efforts are not sufficient to ensure the sustainable use of fish stocks but a collective effort is essential.

At present, there is no basin-wide fishery management in the Black Sea. The only regional body relatively active on fisheries is the Advisory Group for *the Environmental Aspects of Management of Fisheries and other Marine Living Resources* of the Black Sea Commission. This group has helped in the preparation of a Legally Binding Document for fishery and all countries are keen to further develop and adopt such a document. However, there is now a jurisdictional difficulty. Bulgaria and Romania, which are both contracting parties to the Bucharest Convention and Member States of the EU, can no longer individually address this issue since jurisdiction lies with the European Union. Although EU Common Fishery Policy (CFP) has now extended into the Black Sea, the success of any fishery policy requires co-operation with the non-European members of the Black Sea coastal countries, most notably of Turkey, due to the characteristics of the fishery.

It seems that at present, the most likely way forward now to agree on a legally binding document on Black Sea fisheries is to sign a protocol to the Bucharest Convention<sup>3</sup>. This way, Black Sea fishery policy will be thoroughly embedded in an institutional structure that takes the larger environmental view on Black Sea fisheries into consideration. This idea is also shared by the EU but the progress is hampered by the fact that the EU is not a member of the Bucharest Convention.

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<sup>3</sup> Ståle Knudsen 2008. GFCM Black Sea programme: Preliminary elements for a project framework.

Because of this, in the Black Sea Synergy document, accession of the European Community to the Bucharest Convention is stated as a priority. The EC has already an observer status in the Black Sea Commission. Discussion on the EU's membership to the Bucharest Convention is on the agenda of the upcoming Ministerial Meeting in October 2008 by the Contracting Parties. This is one of the most pressing political issues for the Black Sea region.

### **Concluding Remarks**

We are fully aware that the EU wants also to protect this sea, which is the overall aim of the Bucharest Convention. I personally believe that the knowledge and experience of the EC will be invaluable for the protection of the Black Sea ecosystem. Economic development and high growth rates of the Black Sea countries seen in recent years are increasing the pressure on the environment. The main challenge here is to speed up and strengthen cooperation between the Black Sea Commission and the EC, to create a new synergy.

Thank you.