



**COUNCIL OF
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NOTE

from: General Secretariat of the Council
to: Delegations
Subject: European Parliament plenary meeting of 17 April
Statement by the High Representative: Black Sea strategy

Commissioner FULE, replacing the High Representative, gave the speech in Annex 1.

In the short debate that followed, Mr UNGUREANU, speaking for the EPP, acknowledged that some progress had been made in areas such as maritime policy, environment and fisheries. However, in spite of calls from the European Parliament in 2008 and 2011, he was disappointed at the lack of reporting on the Black Sea Synergy and the delay of specific policy instruments.

Mr ROUCEK, on behalf of the S&D, emphasised the need to create security, stability and prosperity in the region and to resolve frozen conflicts. He welcomed the sectorial step-by-step approach of the Commission and called for a more active role of the European Parliament.

Mr MOLZER (NI) focused on the increasing importance of energy supply security and the need to build new pipelines. He favoured more supply diversification without however creating new dependencies and asked for consideration to be given also to the legitimate interest of Russia in this respect.

Other intervening members such as Mr KARAS (EPP), Ms BASESCU (EPP), Mr KALFIN (S&D) and Ms TICAU (S&D) recalled the need for a more strategic approach including a concrete action plan, called for a resolution of frozen conflicts to enhance regional stability, advocated an improvement in energy security, a common maritime strategy and more EU involvement in culture and education.

In his closing remarks Commissioner FULE said that the Black Sea Synergy, together with an integrated maritime strategy and the Danube strategy, were of concrete help to the region and its coastal countries. He informed the plenary that the review of the Baltic Sea policy, including democracy building, was taken seriously but that sometimes good substantive ideas were lacking. He concluded that the EU remained committed to strengthening the relationship with partners in the region and said that the EU should play a more effective role .

CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY

Mr President, honourable Members of the European Parliament,

I am pleased to have the opportunity today to discuss on behalf of High Representative/Vice-President Ashton our regional cooperation efforts and perspectives in the Black Sea area. I welcome the attention that the European Parliament is giving to Black Sea regional cooperation.

The Black Sea region is a distinct geographical area rich in human and natural resources. It acts as a gateway between Europe, Asia and the Middle East and therefore offers Black Sea stakeholders an opportunity to identify areas where our interests come together to further practical cooperation.

Since 2007, with the accession of Bulgaria and Romania, the European Union has been directly involved in Black Sea affairs. There are significant opportunities and challenges in the region that require coordinated action. This is why we established the Black Sea Synergy in 2008 as the European Union's contribution to regional cooperation.

I am sometimes asked whether the Black Sea Synergy duplicates the Eastern Partnership. My answer is no. The Eastern Partnership is about bringing our Eastern neighbours closer to the European Union through political association and economic integration. The Black Sea Synergy is about bringing the European Union closer to the Black Sea by contributing to regional cooperation.

Let me add a couple of personal comments here. There is, of course, interaction between the two – between the Eastern Partnership and the Black Sea Synergy. We have developed the Eastern Partnership into a major instrument of our relationship with our eastern partners. I think it gives us an opportunity for the Black Sea Synergy to become a real instrument providing us with synergies between our policies in our region as we put together our efforts to build more of the European Union in our partner countries through our cross-border cooperation and our more active role in a regional framework of cooperation.

While our interests in the Black Sea are broad, ranging from the environment, maritime affairs and fisheries to energy, transport, movement and security, we have focused our activities on the creation of the three sectoral partnerships in the fields of the environment, transport and energy. In March 2010 we launched the Environment Partnership.

In addition, we have a substantial programme of cross-border cooperation in the region which I referred to a second ago. The budget for the 2007-2013 Black Sea basin programme under the cross-border element of the European Neighbourhood and Partnership Instrument has increased from EUR 17 million to almost EUR 26 million.

The 18 projects implemented after the first call for proposals cover the three priorities of the European Union's 2007-2013 Black Sea basin programme: supporting cross-border partnerships for economic and social development, sharing resources and competences for environmental protection and conservation, and supporting cultural and educational initiatives for the establishment of a common cultural environment in the basin. However, we have not progressed as much as we would have hoped in implementing the three partnerships. The time has thus come to reflect anew on how to take our cooperation in the Black Sea region forward. I therefore welcome the opportunity to discuss this with you.

As for the future Black Sea Strategy, we have to make sure it will be well received both within the European Union and among the Black Sea States that are not part of our Union. In the meantime, we are reflecting on how to revitalise the Black Sea Synergy as a natural step towards the future Strategy.

In taking this forward, we will have three considerations uppermost in our minds. Firstly, we must reinvigorate the European Union's approach to cooperation in the Black Sea region in a way which takes account of the variety of relations we have with the countries around the Black Sea. We have a candidate country (Turkey) and a strategic partner (Russia), plus our partners within the Eastern Partnership: Ukraine, Moldova, Georgia, Armenia and Azerbaijan. We will also have to bear in mind the sometimes difficult relations these countries have with each other or with countries neighbouring the Black Sea region.

Secondly, we will need to take into account the other cooperation frameworks in the region. We do not need to reinvent the wheel. In the environmental field, the Black Sea Commission is an important player, and the European Union hopes to be accepted as a full member soon. We would also like to step up our engagement with the Black Sea Economic Cooperation Organisation, especially in the context of its 20th anniversary Summit due to take place in Istanbul on 26 June.

A reinvigorated Black Sea Synergy initiative and engagement with the Black Sea Economic Cooperation Organisation will provide great opportunities to develop practical cooperation and to foster dialogue between the European Union and Russia and between the European Union and Turkey, both being important stakeholders in the region.

My third and last – and most important – point is this: we must play to the European Union’s strengths and the opportunities offered by the Lisbon Treaty to bring together our internal and external policies and instruments.

I will continue to value the exchanges with Parliament on the Black Sea region as we take forward our process of reflection on how to enhance the European Union’s policy approach towards this important region.