

SEArica Conference on the Black Sea

How can regional frameworks foster sustainable blue growth in the Black Sea basin?

03 December 2020, 10.00-12.30 CET

Online Meeting

Welcome address

Ms Carmen AVRAM, Member of the European Parliament (MEP), Vice-Chair of the SEArica Intergroup, responsible for the Danube and the Black Sea thanked the CPMR Balkan and Black Sea Commission ([CPMR BBSC](#)) and the International Centre for Black Sea Studies ([ICBSS](#)) for organising the webinar, which brings together stakeholders from the wider Black Sea region. After welcoming the participants to this first conference on the Black Sea, aimed to set a general framework, which will then allow for the organisation of further conferences on more specific topics, she presented the SEArica Intergroup and its objectives.

Keynote speakers:

Mr Christos ECONOMOU, Acting Director for Maritime Policy and Blue Economy, Directorate-General for Maritime Affairs and Fisheries (DG MARE), European Commission, presented the Common Maritime Agenda for the Black Sea ([CMA](#)). He highlighted the importance of regional solutions when it comes to the blue economy instead of focusing on each country's national level. He welcomed the progress made during the year on the CMA for the Black Sea, despite the pandemic crisis. However, he outlined that the current crisis leads to reconsidering the way to implement the priorities of the CMA, while taking into account the efforts made to steer the recovery towards achieving green objectives. He then underlined the necessity to include regional and international stakeholders in implementing the priorities of the agenda. He finally welcomed the creation of a dedicated network for stakeholders as well as the setting up of an assistance mechanism for the countries, building on the experience drawn from other sea basins.

Ms Anna KARDJEVA from the Bulgarian Coordination Team of the Steering Group of the Common Maritime Agenda (CMA) for the Black Sea and the Ministry of Transport, Information Technology and Communications of the Republic of Bulgaria, presented the challenges and achievements of the CMA for the Black Sea Steering Group coordination activities in 2020. She reminded participants that, on behalf of the [Bucharest Ministerial Declaration of 21 May 2019](#) and based on the experience of the Bulgarian Presidency of the Council of the EU, Bulgaria became the 1st Coordinator of the CMA Steering Group. The main priorities have been set on "Clean Water", "Green Connectivity" and "Digital Connectivity". Furthermore, she pointed out that, in reaction to the coronavirus crisis, the second and third meetings on the steering group focused on the blue economy sectors most severely hit by the pandemic, including coastal and maritime tourism; maritime transport as well as fisheries and aquaculture. She then welcomed the willingness shown by the CMA countries to start discussions on the socio-economic challenges exacerbated by the pandemic and the perspectives offered by the CMA to overcome these challenges. She also stressed that CMA countries agreed on the importance to

involve the CMA in the recovery and to consider digitalisation as a pivotal cross-cutting process to support smart sustainable development.

Ms Sieglinde GRUBER, Head of Healthy Oceans & Seas (RTD.C.4) Unit, Healthy Planet, Directorate-General for Research and Innovation (DG RTD), European Commission, first explained how the research and innovation projects are fitting into the Common Maritime Agenda (CMA). She emphasised the importance of technology developments and innovation to protect the seas, and especially the Black Sea, to increase the resilience of both the populations and the ecosystems. She explained that the coronavirus pandemic highlighted the necessity to address simultaneously a broad range of factors and to act in collaboration. This is why research and innovation are at the heart of the CMA for the Black Sea and why the European Commission launched the Black Sea Strategic Research and Innovation Agenda ([SRIA](#)). Ms Gruber then mentioned three relevant projects: the [PRIDE](#) Project on biodiversity, the [CIVITAS PORTIS](#) project on sustainable port mobility and the [SIMSEA](#) project, which provides a tool to examine the present and future state of the marine ecosystems, and that could also inform and support the implementation of EU policies including the [Marine Strategy Framework Directive](#). She then presented a new European Research area bringing together the divisions between different countries' research and innovation systems. She thus pointed out the importance of translating and easing access to research results so that it translates into innovation. She announced that the Commission will therefore deploy some of the instruments enshrined in the Horizon Europe Programme, which is due to be adopted in the near future. She said that Bulgaria and Romania will be eligible for hosting and coordinating a role in this "widening programme", which will also be open to countries from the EU Neighbourhood. Finally, she presented the future [Missions on Oceans, Seas, Inland Waters](#), which the European Commission has included in the Horizon Europe Programme and the new framework for [partnerships](#).

Professor Dr Baris SALIHOGLU, Black Sea CONNECT Coordinator and Director of the Institute of Marine Sciences of the Middle East Technical University (IMS METU, Turkey) in his [presentation](#) mentioned the on-going activities of the [Black Sea Strategic Research and Innovation Agenda \(SRIA\)](#) and the [Black Sea CONNECT](#) project. He first touched upon the peculiarities of doing research on the Black Sea basin, stressing that 90% of the Black Sea is oxygen free, as there is no oxygen below 100 metres. He also explained that the Black Sea has been acting under the effect of multiple pressures for 40-50 years, especially human stressors, including deoxygenation, acidification, overfishing, invasive species, eutrophication etc. Considering these issues, he stressed the importance of fostering a science-based policy, with the European Commission's Blue Growth Strategy giving a long-term framework, on which more specific policies can be built up. He then outlined the process of the creation of the Black Sea SRIA, which has been built on the several existing SRIAs and was launched in 2019 in Romania. The first pillar of SRIA mainly addresses the several stressors and focuses on increasing the knowledge and ecosystem resilience as well as on better understanding the land, seas and atmosphere connections with the deep basin. The second pillar focuses on science-based policy. The third pillar promotes observing and monitoring systems. Finally, the fourth pillar puts the emphasis on education and capacity building. He then explained that the Black Sea CONNECT H2020 project was created with the aim to implement and regularly update the SRIA. He said that several consultations have been launched in the partner countries to update the SRIA and launch the implementation. Finally, he presented the transnational joint actions focusing on the impacts of COVID-19 on ecosystems, on the [Young Ambassador Programme](#) and on Marine Plastic.

Mr Tornike RIJVADZE, Chairman of Government of the Ajara Autonomous Republic (Georgia), CPMR BBSC Member and CPMR Vice-President responsible for Neighbourhood Policy thanked Ms Avram and SEArca for kindly hosting the 1st SEArca conference on the Black Sea and all distinguished speakers and participants for joining it. He reminded participants that the CPMR has been holding the SEArca secretariat since it was launched in 2010 and welcomed the creation of a concrete framework on the Black Sea initiated by the European Commission, in which the CPMR and its Balkan and Black Sea Commission is actively present as the only Association of Regions with a specific Geographical Commission dedicated to the region. Mr Rijvadze touched upon the CPMR BBSC's contribution in other relevant initiatives in the region, such as the Regional Stakeholders Conference 'Black Sea Synergy: the way forward' organised by the International Centre for Black Sea Studies (ICBSS). Mr Rijvadze mentioned Ajara's assets and priorities as a Black Sea coastal region near the foot of the Lesser Caucasus Mountains, and touched upon the important work that needs to be carried out as part of the recovery efforts in the aftermath of the coronavirus crisis. He highlighted that tourism has been one of the most affected areas and called for this issue to be addressed jointly in the Black Sea and underlined that the CPMR together with its Member Regions and partners will work so that today's first event's outcomes will lead to more specific events focusing on the different areas of interest to the Black Sea and more concrete ideas for policies and synergies.

Debate with key regional stakeholders on blue economy priorities (open discussion):

Associate Professor Dr Taner ALBAYRAK, Piri Reis University (Turkey), Black Sea Association of Maritime Institutions ([BSAMI](#)) explained that the educational consortium he represents has the support of more than 10,000 stakeholders from the maritime sector. He underlined how the institutions try to apply a holistic and multi-disciplinary approach to maritime issues, cooperating on several on-going projects with further universities from the Black Sea area such as Turkey, Bulgaria, Romania, Ukraine, Russia and Georgia. He explained that BSAMI, with which the CPMR and its BBSC have signed a Memorandum of Understanding, also cooperates with Baltic countries and universities, exchanging best practices and knowledge, as the two basins are quite similar. He deplored the difficulties education systems encounter in keeping pace with fast developing technology. Professor Albayrak further highlighted that BSAMI institutions are taking proactive measures, developing courses as disseminating tools to their partners, in order to raise awareness of new technologies among their students. He mentioned [MENTORESS](#) project on gender equity as well as the on-going Maritime Innovative Network of Education for Emerging Maritime Issues ([MINE-EMI](#)) project, also involving the CPMR. The project focuses on the elaboration of a Joint Master Programme (JMPs) that facilitates developing skills and competences to raise awareness on emerging maritime issues in the wider Black Sea region to promote sustainable management of the maritime sector in the region. Professor Albayrak also mentioned on-going projects on marine pollution and environmental protection, digital transformation, illustrating the willingness of Piri Reis University to respond proactively to emerging trends. Finally, he presented a skills-upgrading initiative involving local communities on the topic of tourism and hospitality management

Ms Florentina CARAMITRU, representing Constanta County Council (Romania), also Project Manager for two projects in the Black Sea cross border cooperation programme 2014-2020, started by stating the importance for Constanta to manage its tourism ecosystem, including Black Sea shores to develop and promote competitive touristic products. She underlined how the Black Sea is important for

coastal, touristic, and commercial activities. Around Constanta, many regions and sites have been included in the European cultural routes and many more could follow, as there is a high number of archaeological remains and a high cultural diversity. She explained how Constanta County Council has understood the importance of the Black Sea and approved, at local and national level, the integrated sustainable tourism development strategy for 2019-2028. Constanta County Council is highly interested in developing and promoting new sea routes in the coastal area with partners from Bulgaria, but not only, to increase the number of international tourists. Ms Caramitru also suggested the development, first at regional level, then to be exported at cross-border level, of an online Black Sea network for a better understanding of Black Sea needs. The network should map all the stakeholders involved in Black Sea issues, and promote relevant actions in the economic, touristic, transport, environmental and cultural field. It would also serve as an informing tool on regional authorities and their responsibilities. Ms Caramitru stressed how the main aim should be to inform about common problems, common solutions, funding possibilities, new ideas and opportunities. She finally presented several EU projects of cross-border cooperation in the environmental and cultural fields that Constanta County Council is currently implementing. [TREASURE](#), for instance, focuses on the underwater heritage in the Black Sea basin.

Ms Emma GILEVA, representing the Black Sea NGO Network ([BSNN](#)), explained how her civil society organisation is involved in cross-border activities with members and associates from the wider Black Sea area and reaches the Danube area. Their aim is to ensure better access to information and better decision-making. One example is the on-going project on free access to marine data and environmental monitoring data tools for the Black Sea basin ([MARLITER](#)), focusing on reducing marine litter through informed decision-making and education. Ms Gileva highlighted how civil society serves as a link between different institutions, such as scientific institutes, natural allies of civil society in the acquisition of data, but also administrations and businesses, therefore improving environmental and marine governance. Ms Gileva welcomed the perspective of zero pollution ambition for Europe, as BSNN considers that litter prevention and collection, and recycling is essential to the environmental health of the Black Sea and puts it at the heart of its actions. She underlined that the importance of focusing on biodiversity to preserve mental and physical health, and to strengthen our ability to cope with environmental and health challenges. Ms Gileva stressed the importance of civil society in targeting evidence-based decision-making, acting as a binding mechanism between different spheres, spreading knowledge and skills and introducing innovation.

Ms Evgeniia KOSTIANAIA, Black Sea Young Ambassador from Russia, presented the [Black Sea Young Ambassadors](#) she is part of, bringing together 17 young Ambassadors under the Black Sea CONNECT Project. The aim of the Black Sea Young Ambassadors is to empower the next generation for a resilient and productive Black Sea. The Ambassadors came up with two main priorities for their actions: fostering ocean engaged citizens and tackling multiple stressors and factors affecting the Black Sea. Ms Kostianaia stressed the importance of raising ocean awareness on the uniqueness of the Black Sea, as well as on its problems and challenges. She explained that the Ambassadors are working on ocean literacy and on setting up campaigns similar to successful campaigns seen around the world. The Ambassadors would like to introduce a major coastline clean-up event on a single day, for instance on the Black Sea Day, to raise awareness on marine litter. Ms Kostianaia then presented the second priority, namely the multiple stressors originated by anthropogenic factors, such as the danger of

microplastic and plastic. The connection the Ambassadors would like to highlight between the two priorities is the necessity to gather the stakeholders in the marine sectors, such as scientists and academia, industry and public. She concluded by welcoming the participation of young people in the development of the UN decade of ocean science for sustainable development, and by wishing that the Young Ambassador programme could contribute to that aim.

Mr Valentin MOLDOVEANU, Acting President of the Balkan and Black Sea Commission, Tulcea County Council (Romania), thanked Ms Carmen Avram and SEARICA for hosting this conference and all the speakers and participants for their contribution, and encouraged the organisation of more events on both the Black Sea and the Danube. Mr Moldoveanu assured participants that as a Member of the Mission Board on Healthy Oceans, Seas, Coastal and Inland Waters, he will share all relevant information and our region's perspective with his colleagues at the Mission Board. He stressed that in the past year the BBSC has been working for an ever-closer cooperation with stakeholders from the wider Black Sea region and expressed the CPMR and its BBSC's eagerness to welcome new members and work together to promote the region's interests.

To the **European Boating Industry's** (which represents the recreational boating industry in Europe), question about the role of recreational boating and nautical tourism in the Black Sea, **Associate Professor Dr Taner ALBAYRAK** explained that the recreational boating industry is not very developed in the Black Sea area because of the short summer, but also because of the lack of facilities and **Professor Dr Baris SALIHOGLU** added that one of the priorities of the Black Sea SRIA is to link the boating industry with other tourism sectors, such as pesca-tourism and underwater heritage, and he took note of the input to include recreational boating in the further implementation of the programme.

Mr Igor KAPYRIN, Deputy Director of European Cooperation at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation, stressed that Russia is very interested in the Common Maritime Agenda and asked the host, MEP Carmen AVRAM, whether the European Parliament is planning on developing relations at parliamentary level with the national parliaments of the Black Sea countries. **Ms AVRAM** responded that even if the European Parliament is cooperating with several parliaments outside the EU, there is the need to go further. She explained that the European Parliament was going to ask for an "Own-Initiative-Report" (INI report). She stressed the urgent need for more cooperation, especially in the Black Sea, being one of the most polluted basins of the world.

Mr Michael MANNAART, Executive Secretary at KIMO Netherlands-Belgium, asked how the development of blue growth activities will be linked to the environmental targets of the Marine Strategy Framework Directive Strategies and Action Plans of the Black Sea countries. **Mr Christos ECONOMOU** answered that there are several on-going dedicated projects, for instance one on plastic litter from DG ENVI. He underlined how the national level alone is not fit to tackle this problem, and that the broader dimension of rivers has to be taken into account.

Ms Sieglinde GRUBER added that one of the joint actions of Black Sea Connect is actually going to target marine litter, and that it was agreed together with PlasticsEurope, the representative of the industry. She also expressed her hope that young Ambassadors play an important role in this matter. She stressed how this issue must be tackled on land first, with a particular attention to the land-sea

connection: inflow from the rivers. Ms Gruber also mentioned an on-going pilot action, working for a [plastic-free](#) Mediterranean Sea, which could be taken as an inspiration to identify what local successful initiatives can be spread. She also announced that the science advisory mechanism to the EU Commission will release a report on Biodegradable plastics. What is biodegradable on land is not biodegradable at sea, and Ms Gruber stressed the need for massive investment in research to make that happen in the sea as well.

Ms Carmen AVRAM asked the EU Commission's representatives how to get onboard the Fishermen's associations, as they are on the first line suffering from biodiversity loss. **Mr Christos ECONOMOU** stressed the importance of the [Sofia Ministerial Declaration](#), to foster cooperation between the different countries. He added that the CMA aims for the interaction between different sectors to be considered, as well as the diversification of fishers' activities and the awareness for the consequences of pollution on stocks. He stressed how sustainability and innovation in the Fisheries sector is at the heart of the CMA.

Mr George GABEDAVA, Assistant Professor / Head of International Relations Service at the Batumi Navigation Teaching University (Georgia), asked how students and new generations will be involved in the implementation of the Agenda. **Ms Sieglinde GRUBER** stressed the importance of programmes such as [Erasmus+](#) and [Creative Europe](#) to involve young generations. She also highlighted that each action and programme they have been mentioning always has a training component. She recognised the limited outreach of these programmes and emphasised the importance of implementing strategies to create a more vibrant blue growth ecosystem for communities and create more opportunities for young people.

Ms Mariam AVAKOVA, Black Sea Young Ambassador from Georgia, underlined the importance of common opportunities to empower young enthusiast passionate scientists in an early stage to be involved in different research projects and initiatives so that they contribute to tackling the challenges.

The organisers also took note of the following questions and of the future SEArICA events focused on the Black Sea.

Mr Mamuka GVILAVA, ICZM National Focal Point for Georgia and Black Sea Commission ICZM Advisory Group Member, asked if there are integrations between the EU Marine Strategy Framework Directive (MSFD) and the Water Framework Directive (WFD) in marine and coastal waters.

Ms Deniz KONAKLI, Researcher at the Turkish Marine Research Foundation (TUDAV) asked for more information regarding the stakeholders that it is more difficult to connect with and the sectors and countries that stronger ties are needed with.

Closing remarks

Ms Carmen AVRAM concluded the meeting by thanking the speakers and the participants and by reminding participants that this was a general event to update both policy-makers and regional stakeholders on the latest actions, complementary to the [CMA Regional Stakeholder Conference](#). She emphasised the necessity to follow-up on the many ideas for further cooperation in the Black Sea presented, and suggested further events on plastic and marine litter in the Black Sea extended to the Danube area and on sturgeons, a dramatically endangered species of the Black Sea basin.

Ms Georgia CHANTZI, Research and Policy Development Manager at ICBSS shared the link of the Black Sea Virtual Knowledge Centre ([BSEC-BSVKC](#)) for Blue Economy.

Mr Frederick HERPERS, Project Manager of the Black Sea Assistance Mechanism ([BSAM](#)) invited all participants to the [Common Maritime Agenda for the Black Sea 2020 Regional Stakeholders Conference](#).