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REGION OF CENTRAL MACEDONIA A BRIDGE BETWEEN TWO SEAS

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(Challenges and Opportunities for Cruise Tourism in the Mediterranean Sea and the Black Sea)

The role of Central Macedonia - Coordinator of the CPMR Balkan and Black Sea Regional Commission (BBSRC) Working Group on Tourism - as a bridge between the Black and Mediterranean Seas

The Conference of Peripheral Maritime Regions of Europe ([CPMR](#)) is a network of 150 regions from 28 countries from the EU and beyond, representing almost 200 million people. The CPMR is organised into 6 Geographical Commissions corresponding to the main sea basins of Europe (Black Sea, Mediterranean Sea, Atlantic Arc, North Sea, and Baltic Sea) and the islands.

The Region of Central Macedonia, which I have the honour to represent at this meeting, is a member of the CPMR Balkan and Black Sea Regional Commission ([BBSRC](#)), and coordinator of the Working Group dedicated to Tourism. However, the geographical position of our region renders it a cruise destination for both Black Sea and Mediterranean itineraries and therefore a bridge between these two seas.

Regional cooperation in cruise tourism in the Black and Mediterranean Seas

In 2014, further to the Communication "[A European Strategy for more growth and jobs in coastal and maritime tourism](#)" published by the European Commission (DG MARE / DG ENTERPRISE), our Geographical Commission in collaboration with the Research in Shipping and Ports Laboratory ([Re.Shi.P.](#)) of the University of the Aegean - [Department of Shipping, Trade and Transport](#), released a questionnaire on regional priorities within the context of this Strategy. The questionnaire was sent to various stakeholders in the Black Sea, Greece and Cyprus and its results, [presented](#) within the framework of our Commission's General Assembly, highlighted the top priorities of the region, the level of cooperation desired, and paved the way for future planning regarding this particular type of tourism.

From then on, under the CPMR - our umbrella organisation - and together with the University of the Aegean that is also present is this Pan-European Dialogue, we have been working closely in order to promote this Strategy in the wider Balkan and Black Sea area.

Within the framework of our Geographical Commission, we try to ensure a proper knowledge of the area, by collaborating closely with representative members from each country, whereas through our organisation, by coordinating with the Intermediterranean Commission and the CPMR Working Group on Tourism, and by taking full advantage of our partnerships with international organisations in the region. The CPMR's expertise and continuous involvement in European policies, since 1973, as well as its extended network, allow us to have access to best practice resources that we could enrich and disseminate to the Black Sea basin and the Eastern Mediterranean.

The capital and main port city of our Region and Northern Greece in general, Thessaloniki, as a cruise destination is located in the well-established cruise market of South Eastern Europe and East Mediterranean, is close to major cruise ports of Greece and Turkey, and a destination of Black Sea cruise itineraries. The Mediterranean climate of our region and the ability to develop multiple itineraries with different characteristics renders it an attraction of different market groups and a year-round cruise destination.

Many tourists nowadays seek a unique and customised experience rather than the more traditional type of "sun-and-sea" package holiday. These changes on the demand side require reaction and adaptation by operators and destinations. Cruise passengers visiting Thessaloniki, a city with developed conference and exhibition facilities, and adequate accommodation infrastructures, are offered the opportunity for diversified shore and inland activities and excursions in the whole Region of Central Macedonia (unique archaeological sites, specialised tours, coastal and marine archaeology, maritime heritage, underwater and eno-gastronomic activities, to name but a few).

Ports for the future

Central Macedonia's prosperity - and for all of Greece of course - has always been linked to sea trade and ports, which have great potential for sustaining growth in the years ahead. As gateways to the Black Sea, Mediterranean Sea and the EU's entire transport network, ports are engines of economic development. Not only are they important for foreign trade and local growth, but ports are also the key for developing an integrated and sustainable transport system, as we work to get trucks off our saturated land transport corridors and make more use of short sea shipping. In addition, more cargo, cruise ships and ferries in our ports mean more jobs.

The port of Thessaloniki is located at the heart of the city and at a distance of 15 km from the International Airport "Macedonia". It has sufficient infrastructures and superstructures and the ability to handle even the biggest cruise ships, as the port basin provides sufficient space and depth for manoeuvring. The cruise terminal has three docks and is well protected from weather conditions (winds, undulation, etc.), providing a safe berthing for cruise ships. The port of Thessaloniki fully complies with the International Ship and Port Facility Security (ISPS) Code requirements and holds an ECOPORT certification from the European Sea Ports Organisation (ESPO), and provides a full arrange of services to cruise ships and cruise passengers.

The Thessaloniki Port Authority S.A. aims at exploiting the South Balkan markets, which have great potential. Within this framework, the increase of cruise traffic is a strategic decision of the Port Authority, who has concluded synergies with the City of Thessaloniki,

and memoranda of understanding with the Industrial and Commercial Chamber and the Traders Association. The efforts of the Port Authority to attract cruise traffic at the port city of Thessaloniki are evident on the ThPA's aggressive port tariff policy. Since July 2010 a price reduction policy for port services provision at the cruise terminal has been applied. More specifically:

- Zero barge fees for barges used by cruise ships, and
- A 20% reduction in the cruise ships passenger embarkation/transit fee¹.

These efforts have been yielding positive results since 2012.

Cruise tourism: Environmental Sustainability and Entrepreneurship

Maritime spatial planning and coastal and maritime tourism under a common European framework are recent, but as a Regional Authority of a Member State we will comply with any new requirements. Yet our geographical position and collaboration with stakeholders from non-Member States give us the possibility to act as a communication channel for common environmental problems and best practice.

At a regional level, among the priorities of Central Macedonia is the decrease of the environmental footprint. Our Region attempts to limit the negative impact of relevant to coastal and maritime tourism activities, cruise tourism included, and of other practices that influence the coastal and marine environments. To this end, the use of energy and water saving, smart transport, smart buildings, green materials technologies, together with our planning for innovation, will also take into consideration the increasing demand of cruise tourism.

The SWOT analyses regarding tourism and entrepreneurship in our Region have led us to concrete conclusions in order to work towards fostering diversification of high quality tourism products for all target groups (disabled persons and the elderly included), encouraging job creation, confronting seasonality and environmental risk prevention.

The promotion of coastal and marine tourism requires close cooperation between relevant stakeholders, at all levels. The Conference of Peripheral Maritime Regions of Europe could create a permanent, structured forum/platform of discussion bringing together the cruise industry, Port Authorities and European/regional/local actors, in order to promote alternative tourism of our areas. The Region of Central Macedonia as an active Member of the CPMR would be glad to participate in the follow-up of the Pan-European Dialogue at regional level and to act as a representative of the EU in the wider Balkan and Black Sea area and the wider Eastern Mediterranean and vice-versa.

¹ Port tariffs are posted on the ThPA's official website (www.thpa.gr)
