

	<p>CONFERENCE OF PERIPHERAL MARITIME REGIONS OF EUROPE ΔΙΑΣΚΕΨΗ ΠΕΡΙΦΕΡΕΙΑΚΩΝ & ΠΑΡΑΚΤΙΩΝ ΠΕΡΙΦΕΡΕΙΩΝ ΤΗΣ ΕΥΡΩΠΗΣ</p> <p>BALKAN & BLACK SEA REGIONAL COMMISSION (BBSRC) ΕΠΙΤΡΟΠΗ ΒΑΛΚΑΝΙΩΝ & ΕΥΞΕΙΝΟΥ ΠΟΝΤΟΥ</p>	
<p>BBSRC - P.O Box 9330 - 10032 KAVALA - GREECE Tel.: + 30 69 32 21 76 95 / + 30 21 03 64 28 88 - Fax: + 30 21 03 64 63 02 e.mail: apaplaw@hol.gr - www.balkansblacksea.org</p>		

Inaugural Meeting of the Conference of Regional and Local Authorities of the Eastern Partnership - CORLEAP

8 September 2011, Poznań (Poland)

Pavlos DAMIANIDIS, President of the CPMR Balkan and Black Sea Regional Commission, Deputy Regional Governor, Region of East Macedonia & Thrace

Firstly, I wish to thank the Committee of the Regions for having invited me, as a representative of the Conference of Peripheral Maritime Regions, to this important event. We all believe that CORLEAP will provide a useful regional and local content to this promising Eastern Partnership, wisely and strongly supported by the Polish Presidency of the EU.

I would like to say a few words to introduce the CPMR to those of you, in particular among our most Eastern friends, who have not yet had the opportunity to get in touch with our organisation. We bring together some 160 European maritime Regions (both EU and non-EU), promoting together a series of principles, which include increased territorial cohesion, and better governance with more scope given to the Regions in decision-making and implementation of policies. We are also very committed to shaping the European maritime policy, considering that the EU has not yet fully taken advantage of its very maritime geography.

At the border of the EU, the Black Sea is one of these European areas where we wish to promote more cooperation and more sustainable development, with the support of the EU. I am the President of the Balkan and Black Sea Regional Commission (one of the 6 Geographical Commissions of the CPMR), which brings together 30 Regions from Greece, Turkey, Romania, Bulgaria, Croatia and Ukraine. On 8th of July in Varna, Bulgaria, we voted a declaration calling for “an integrated EU strategy for the Black Sea Region”, along with the Eastern Partnership dimension, taking into full consideration the European Parliament Resolution of January 2011.

We do regret that the recent EU Communication on the new European Neighbourhood Policy has even not referred to this Black Sea Dimension. But we are not here to complain but to act, and to take advantage of the good signals we have also received! On 29 June 2011, the European Commission published its proposals on the multi-annual financial

framework for the period 2014-2020, and neighbourhood comes out significantly better off, with an increased budget from 11.2 billion Euros – for the current period – up to 16.1 billion Euros for the next period. The money will be there (hopefully, if the Member States do not cut it ...), we just have to be active so that the revised regulations make it possible to support wise macro-regional and trans-national strategies, programmes and projects. There are several dimensions of transnational cooperation which need to be promoted. Certainly, the Eastern Partnership is one of these, but a number of sub-areas have to be considered within this wider area, and for sure the “Black Sea Basin” is one of them.

After these general considerations, let me approach the very subject of our thematic discussion: **Local Development and Instruments for Territorial Cooperation.**

Territorial cooperation is one of the most significant development targets of border Regions. Most Regions have both internal EU borders – where cooperation is rather dense – and external EU borders. It is important to acknowledge the very different characters of these border areas and possibilities and challenges that Regions have learned over the years of experience of cooperating with the Eastern neighbours of the EU. The operational environment is essentially different for internal and external border Regions which needs many different approaches to be taken into account and challenges to be overcome. This is also one explanation why a significant amount of cooperation is carried out rather within EU borders than with EU neighbouring countries. In addition, for some regions, the only border is an external border and thus only external cross-border cooperation is possible.

However, development strategies in Eastern external border Regions highly support and promote more dense cooperation with EU neighbouring Regions, as it poses a lot of possibilities for regional development. Specific positions are also acknowledged at EU level e.g. in the Fifth Cohesion Report, which emphasises the specific challenges of Eastern external border Regions and overcoming those challenges.

Most border Regions have a lot of strengths with regard to location and cross-border cooperation. Location, as a bridge between the EU and its Eastern neighbours (Russia, Belarus, Georgia, Azerbaijan, Ukraine, Republic of Moldova and Turkey) is very important and relevant for the whole EU. It is a large and ever-growing market area and e.g. investment opportunities in both directions are large.

Many Eastern border Regions have a lot of cooperation know-how with their Eastern neighbouring Regions and countries that has grown out over the years. That know-how has a lot to offer for bringing the EU closer to its neighbours. Strong cooperation at regional grass-roots level and the existence of minorities and immigrants in the Regions as well, makes the “border” lower, brings Regions and countries closer to each other, as well as makes external frontiers safer and more secure.

However, many challenges and threads need to be solved, first for more dense and efficient cooperation: some at wider trans-national level and some at programme policy and at day-to-day grass-roots cooperation level. Visa and border crossing bureaucracy, weak transport infrastructure within border areas and development gaps across the border are seen as challenging for cross-border cooperation. Different operational environments, changing legislation and centralised decision-making and political debates

are perceived to weaken cooperation possibilities as well. On the other hand, at regional level human capital needs to be improved, such as language skills, increasing the interest of SMEs towards internationalisation and know-how on international cooperation and programmes as well as more positive attitudes and tolerance. Thus, because of all these reasons, SMEs, the education sector and other organisations need a lot of information, knowledge and resources to be able to operate in such a challenging environment.

Some EaP Partners have structural problems stemming from sharp economic and social disparities between their Regions and population groups. To address these challenges, funding will be provided to support pilot regional development programmes addressing local needs for infrastructure, human capital, and small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) modelled on EU Cohesion Policy. The programmes will be based on the needs of the respective Partner Country and take into account its territorial organisation.

As a specific cross-border cooperation tool, the ENPI programme needs to be highlighted as it is relevant tool for cross-border cooperation for external cross-border Regions. There are many challenges concerning the implementation of ENPI programmes, which Regions also emphasised in the ENPI position paper (2010). Regions see that the management of ENPI projects is highly challenging, as many rules differ in EU and non-EU Regions, procedures are complicated with many operational and technical problems and assistance from a joint technical secretary/management authority and members of the programme committee is not allowed before and during project implementation. Also finding eligible partners is difficult and ENPI project management skills are lacking. Sometimes, because of e.g. the above mentioned reasons, the results of the projects are found to be insufficient.

Regions and cities in the EU and the countries of the Eastern Partnership can learn a lot from each other. The CPMR - BBSRC is meant to be a meeting place for practitioners and colleagues from local and regional authorities and a useful tool for developing the existing networks and exchanging best practice experience. The Eastern Partnership should become a project for dialogue between citizens and a platform for cooperation, bringing together local and regional authorities through an approach based on solidarity and on citizens' needs.

And we again wish to state that the Eastern Partnership is not only a terrestrial project. A sea is there, the Black Sea, and we hope that we will not forget it in our works, as a source of economic development, and as a fragile area that we have to protect together. The CPMR Balkan and Black Sea Regional Commission wishes also to state its support and strong interest for all initiatives resulting from this Eastern Partnership and places its expertise at the disposal of the EU Institutions to build upon this ambitious initiative, which can only become successful by fully integrating Citizens and their representatives at the closest territorial level, i.e.: regional and local authorities. At its modest level, the CPMR Balkan and Black Sea Commission, which I have the honour to chair, is offering to become the regular counterpart of CORLEAP for the Balkan and Black Sea affairs.

I thank you for your kind attention.