

## Speech

Mr President, Honourable Members of the European Parliament

I am pleased to have the opportunity today to discuss on behalf of HR/VP 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 a stake 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 **does not duplicate the Eastern Partnership**. My answer is a clear "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.

While our interests in the Black Sea are broad, ranging from environment, maritime affairs, fisheries, to energy, transport, movement and security, we have focused our activities on the creation of **three sectoral Partnerships** in the fields of 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. The budget for the 2007-13 Black Sea basin programme under the cross-border element of the European Neighbourhood and Partnership Instrument has increased from 17,5 million to 25,7 million Euro.

The 18 projects implemented after the first call for proposals **cover the three priorities** of the European Union's 2007-13 Black Sea basin programme:

- Supporting cross border partnerships for **economic and social development**.
- Sharing resources and competencies for **environmental protection and conservation**.

- 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. Therefore, **the time has come to reflect anew** on how to take our cooperation in the Black Sea region forward. I welcome the opportunity to discuss this with you. You have an important role in generating European Union Member States' interest in the Black Sea.

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 therefore reflecting on how to revitalize the Black Sea Synergy as a natural step towards the future Strategy.

In taking this work forward, we will have three considerations uppermost in our mind.

- First, 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, a strategic partner in Russia plus our partners within the

Eastern Partnership, Ukraine, Republic of Moldova, Georgia Armenia and Azerbaijan. We will also have to bear in mind the sometimes difficult relations these countries have amongst each other or with countries neighbouring the Black Sea region.

- Second, 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 also would like to step up our engagement with the Black Sea Economic Cooperation Organisation, especially in the context of its 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary Summit (Istanbul, 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.

- Third and most importantly, 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 the Parliament** on the Black Sea region as we take forward our reflections on how to enhance the European Union's policy approach towards the region.

## **Closing Remarks**

Honourable Members,

Our exchange today has been very useful and helps the European Union in forming its policy towards the Black Sea regional cooperation.

The **European Parliament has identified the appropriate fields** on which a future European Union Strategy could be developed, i.e. governance, security, energy, transport, environment, trade, local economic development and social and human development.

Together, the Black Sea Synergy including our extensive range of cross-border cooperation, the European Union's Integrated Maritime Strategy and the European Union's Danube Strategy can build a **coherent approach towards the Black Sea**. My colleague Maria Damanaki has started a process to ensure that all Black Sea coastal countries are actively and equally involved in shaping a common maritime agenda for the basin they share and cooperate further, including towards sustainable fisheries management. A stakeholder conference on maritime affairs and fisheries in the Black Sea will take place in Bucharest in November 2012.

This joined-up approach can **increase the possibilities for cooperation** where there is a common interest between the European Union and its Black Sea partners in tackling the challenges facing the region such as transport, environment, maritime and fisheries policy and education. We hope that this approach will also build increased levels of trust and confidence between the countries around the Black Sea.

**The European Union needs to review its interests in the region –** including the strategic, political, and economic dimensions – and to further discuss how best they can be achieved. In this endeavour, we count on the support of the European Parliament and we look forward to future recommendations.

In the meantime, the European Union's **Black Sea Synergy initiative will remain relevant for establishing solid channels** with the partner States in the region to ensure its smooth and effective implementation. We need to use this opportunity to consult extensively with all stakeholders, starting with our partners in the region, and with the involvement of the European Parliament.

Thank you