Challenges and opportunities for the fishing sector in the Black Sea

2019/2159(INI) - 25/05/2021 - Committee report tabled for plenary, single reading

The Committee on Fisheries adopted an own-initiative report by Ivo HRISTOV (S&D, BG) on the challenges and opportunities for the fishing sector in the Black Sea.

Geographical situation and jurisdiction

The Black Sea is a semi-enclosed sea which is only connected to an ocean by the Mediterranean via the Marmara and the Aegean Seas and is bordered by six countries (Bulgaria, Romania, Turkey, Georgia, Ukraine, Russia), of which only two are Member States (Bulgaria and Romania). With the accession of Bulgaria and Romania to the Union on 1 January 2007, EU legislation and the common fisheries policy (CFP) became applicable to the territorial waters of those two countries. The exclusive economic zones of Bulgaria and Romania represent just 15% of Black Sea waters. This means that the part of the Black Sea falling within the jurisdiction of the EU is closely linked to waters that lie outside the Union. In this context and to efficiently manage fisheries resources, it is essential to conduct a constructive and active dialogue with all the other Black Sea countries (Turkey, Russia, Ukraine and Georgia) and with Moldova which, though not directly bordering on the Black Sea, lies within its catchment area and thus also influences its ecological balance and development.

Overall challenges for the fishing sector

These may be associated with natural factors or human activity, such as pollution (affecting the Black Sea directly, or indirectly via the rivers which flow into it); over-exploitation of resources; introduction of invasive alien species; the lack of a comprehensive approach to raise the profile and increase the profitability of the sector; a lack of workers in the sector; a lack of resources (financial, material and/or human) to collect data on the stocks of fish and non-fish species in the Black Sea basin.

Status of stocks of Black Sea species of major economic importance

Members underlined the high strategic and geopolitical stakes in the Black Sea basin due, among other things, to the very specific environmental conditions, which demand special attention, a tailored approach, ambitious environmental standards and collective actions aimed at achieving a sustainable blue economy and growth.

Members are concerned that after decades of increasing human pressure on the Black Sea marine and Danube River ecosystems and fisheries resources, the latest data suggest that only one stock (sprat) is considered to be sustainably exploited and that other fish stocks are overfished, to the extent that some of them are close to depletion. There have been some positive trends in the past years for some stocks, for example turbot, for which the total allowable catch quota has been increased for 2020-2022, but that there is no significant improvement on a general level for the Black Sea yet.

It is stressed that cooperation on an equal footing in the field of fisheries management is needed in the Black Sea region because of the shared stocks and global challenges, which go beyond national borders.

Members stressed that the lack of sufficient information on fishing activity, catch quantity, catch composition and its impact on the current state of the fish stocks is a critical issue for the Black Sea

region. They underlined, therefore, the need for sufficient funding for scientific bodies researching stocks of fish species in the Black Sea, including migratory species such as sturgeon and Black Sea shads, endangered cetaceans and non-fish species (veined rapa whelks, mussels, etc.), as well as linked parameters for the marine ecosystem.

While stressing the importance of introducing a zero-tolerance policy towards IUU fishing in the Black Sea, Members urged all littoral states to make and combine efforts to end IUU fishing in their waters and to promote sustainable fishing, which, among other things, includes combating overfishing and/or eliminating by-catch of endangered species, such as sturgeon, shads and others.

Trade aspects

Recognising that Black Sea fisheries make a significant contribution to regional and local economies by generating direct revenue and income, driving wider spending and providing crucial jobs either independently or via cooperation with other sectors such as tourism and transport, the report called for cooperation to be strengthened among all sectors that use the marine environment in order to achieve better results and a better balance between the interests of the environment, industry and small-scale fishers.

The fishing fleet of the Black Sea comprises mostly small-scale fishing vessels, which underlines the need for more tailor-made approaches to and policies on this segment of the fishing sector.

A targeted policy for the sector

Member States in the region are urged to consider supporting the sector through its inclusion in their national programmes for 2021-2027 or other national instruments and allocations for campaigns dedicated to the benefits of fish consumption and the importance of sustainable fishing, to support the sector by creating local food chains to facilitate easier access to the market, especially for small-scale fishers, and to develop, improve or facilitate the building of fishery infrastructure (e.g. fish markets or fish auction houses etc.) where applicable. There is also a need to invest more in the implementation, monitoring and enforcement of EU environmental and fisheries legislation.

Environment, biodiversity and climate change

Targeted measures and adequate resources are called for to reduce pollution and by-catch of vulnerable elasmobranchs (such as the piked dogfish) and marine mammals, and for a rapid stepping-up of efforts to safeguard the environment and biodiversity throughout the basin through joint programmes and budgets, drawing in particular on the financial resources available under the European Maritime Fisheries and Aquaculture Fund. The report called for extensive research on and estimates of plastic pollution and the effects of plastics and other pollutants on living organisms in the Black Sea.

Members also called for the swift setting up of monitoring networks and programmes capable of systematically measuring the state of the environment of the Black Sea, as required by the Bucharest Convention.

Lastly, the report called on the Commission to:

- explore whether a multi-annual management plan similar to those in place in other sea basins could be introduced for the Black Sea;

- assess the state of play with regard to the implementation of the common fisheries policy in the Black Sea, paying particular attention to how coastal Member States used the 2014-2020 European Maritime and Fisheries Fund to ensure that stocks were managed sustainably and that biodiversity was improved.