Challenges and opportunities for the fishing sector in the Black Sea

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The European Parliament adopted by 598 votes to 3, with 12 abstentions, a resolution 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 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 EU 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

The resolution stressed that it is important to note, when it comes to assessing the challenges facing the Black Sea fishing sector, that the Black Sea is semi-enclosed and only indirectly connected to the ocean through the Mediterranean Sea (via the Sea of Marmara and the Aegean Sea). There is therefore little interchange of water and matter. This situation poses a danger, inter alia to the environment, and also affects marine organisms, including species of importance to the fishing sector. The waste, and in particular plastic waste but also chemicals, that is directly discharged into the sea or reaches it via watercourses, tends to remain there.

The challenges and opportunities of the Black Sea fishing sector 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.

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.

Information and funding

The resolution highlighted 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. It stressed, 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.

Environment, biodiversity and climate change

Parliament called for targeted measures and adequate resources 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. It also 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. The resolution called for the systematic measurement of nitrogen pollution in the Black Sea basin.

As well as calling for the swift setting up of monitoring networks and programmes capable of systematically measuring the state of the environment of the Black Sea, Parliament also called on the Black Sea littoral states to invest in scientific research and data collection on the effects of climate change on the Black Sea and Lower Danube ecosystems.

Parliament is very concerned by the real threat of extinction facing the remaining five sturgeon species in the Black Sea and Danube Delta basin and welcomed the prolongation of the ban on sturgeon fishing until 2026. The Commission is called on to urgently consider transferring the sturgeon, which is currently listed in Annex V of the Habitats Directive to Annex II or even Annex I.

Practical action

The resolution 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;

- take urgent action to improve the overfishing of certain stocks in 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 EMFF to ensure that stocks were managed sustainably and that biodiversity was improved.