Black Sea regional policy approach

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PURPOSE: Commission Communication on development of cooperation within the Black Sea region and also between the region as a whole and the EU.

CONTENT: the Commission presents this paper on increased EU involvement in further defining cooperation priorities and mechanisms for the Black Sea area and it puts forward Black Sea Synergy as a new regional cooperation initiative of the EU. It defines the Black Sea region as including Greece, Bulgaria, Romania and Moldova in the west, Ukraine and Russia in the north, Georgia, Armenia and Azerbaijan in the east and Turkey in the south.

The European Union has already made major efforts to stimulate democratic and economic reforms, to project stability and to support development in the Black Sea area through wide-ranging cooperation programmes. Three EU policies are relevant in this context: the pre-accession process in the case of Turkey, the European Neighbourhood Policy (with five eastern ENP partners also being active in Black Sea cooperation) and the Strategic Partnership with the Russian Federation. Moreover, the EC has contributed to a whole range of sectoral initiatives of regional relevance. With the accession of Bulgaria and Romania, the prosperity, stability and security of our neighbours around the Black Sea are, more than ever, of immediate concern to the EU. The Commission feels that this requires a more coherent, longer-term effort which would help to seize these opportunities, to bring increased stability and prosperity to the region. Greater EU engagement in Black Sea regional cooperation will contribute to this objective.

At the outset, Black Sea Synergy would focus on those issues and cooperation sectors which reflect common priorities and where EU presence and support is already significant. Consequently, the Communication formulates a number of short- and medium-term tasks related to: democracy, respect for human rights and good governance; managing movement and improving security; a more active EU role through increased political involvement in ongoing efforts to address the conflicts (Transnistria, Abkhazia, South Ossetia and Nagorno- Karabakh); energy; transport; environment; maritime policy; fisheries; trade; research and education networks, science and technology; employment and social affairs; and regional development.

Black Sea Synergy is intended as a flexible framework to ensure greater coherence and policy guidance. In assessing the usefulness of Community support for particular initiatives, the active involvement of the countries and regional bodies directly concerned, including through financing, should serve as a key criterion.

The Commission has established a Black Sea CBC programme under the European Neighbourhood and Partnership Instrument (ENPI). This “sea basin programme” focuses on supporting civil society and local level cooperation in Black Sea coastal areas. In addition, there will be new cross-border co-operation programmes between Bulgaria and Romania (funded from the European Regional Development Fund) and between Bulgaria and Turkey (funded from the Instrument for Pre-Accession). These will both allow for maritime and coastal actions that will enhance the development of links and co-operation along the western coast of the Black Sea.

With regard to financial support, as a general principle, co-financing would be applied. Where appropriate, Community financial support could be available under the national, regional and cross-border programmes of the ENPI, other external assistance instruments and, for EU Member States, the European Regional Development Fund. The increased flexibility of the new EC funding instruments should facilitate the funding of regional cooperation initiatives. The regional activities of the EBRD and the EIB

as well as the Black Sea Trade and Development Bank are already significant and Black Sea Synergy could offer new possibilities, including the development of mechanisms for joint financing, making use of experience gained with schemes like the Northern Dimension partnerships.

A high-level political launch would provide political orientation and visibility to EU Black Sea Synergy. Should Black Sea Synergy partners so decide in the light of tangible progress, regular ministerial meetings might take place, attended by the EU and BSEC countries. Black Sea Synergy would also take advantage of the useful contacts already existing between the European Parliament and the Parliamentary Assembly of BSEC. At present seven EU Member States have observer status with BSEC. Responding to BSEC's initiative, the Commission intends to also seek observer status and to support EU Member States' application for observer status.