Black Sea regional policy approach

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The Committee on Foreign Affairs adopted the own-initiative report by Roberta Alma **ANASTASE** (EPP-ED, RO) in response to the Commission's communication on a Black Sea regional approach. The committee welcomes the objectives set out in this document which aim to enhance regional cooperation in the Black Sea region and which are among the top priorities of the Union's foreign policy agenda.

The report stresses that the Black Sea regional policy approach must be used neither to provide an alternative to EU membership nor to define the frontiers of the EU. It considers, however, that the objectives specified herein should represent an integral and coherent part of the broader EU foreign policy towards the neighbouring countries and countries participating in the Black Sea regional strategy.

The committee focused on the following issues:

Security challenges: the report underlines that the unresolved conflicts persisting in the Black Sea region constitute a major challenge to the stability and sustainable development of the region. It emphasises that the EU needs to define a stable set of priorities in the area of freedom, security and justice within the framework of the Black Sea Synergy, aimed at establishing harmonisation and compatibility in entire policy areas. The committee recalls the need to address the challenges posed by transnational crime, trafficking and illegal migration, whilst fully respecting the non-refoulement principle. Support for a proposal to allow Europol to be given a mandate and resources to produce analytic work relating to the region, in particular in the field of migration has been welcomed.

Promotion of political stability and effective democracy: the report stresses that fostering respect for human rights, democracy and fundamental freedoms is one of the main pillars of the EU's external policy, and emphasises the need to mainstream those values respectively both in bilateral relations and in the regional approach. It stresses the crucial importance of establishing and developing good neighbourly relations among the countries of the Black Sea region and with their neighbours, based on mutual respect, territorial integrity, non-interference in each others' internal affairs and the prohibition of the use of force or threats to use force, as fundamental principles for fostering regional cooperation.

Cooperation in the field of energy and transport: MEPs reiterate their support for the creation of new infrastructure and viable transport corridors diversifying both suppliers and routes, such as the trans-Caspian/trans-Black Sea energy corridor and the Nabucco, Constana-Trieste and AMBO pipelines, as well as other planned gas and oil transit projects crossing the Black Sea and the INOGATE and TRACECA projects. They consider that the sustainable development of the Danube and the economic potential to link the countries surrounding the Black Sea should be among the EU's priorities in the region.

Environmental issues: the committee is deeply concerned about the environmental situation in the Black Sea region, in particular that of the Black Sea, affected by uncontrolled pollution and aggravated by numerous ecological accidents. It calls for increased cooperation between the EU and the Black Sea countries in order to tackle the whole range of environmental challenges in the region.

Economic cooperation: the report points out the uneven, albeit strong, economic growth in the entire region, but draws attention to the fact that growth is more sustained in the oil and gas exporting countries. Stressing the fragility of the private sector in many countries bordering the Black Sea, the committee underlines the need to improve the investment climate, for both local and international companies, in particular by stepping up the fight against corruption and fraud. The report encourages harmonisation and further liberalisation measures and supports the creation of a free trade area in accordance with WTO

principles. MEPs also take into account the significant role of coastal and maritime tourism as a major catalyst for the development of the Black Sea region in terms of trade and economic growth.

Institutional aspects: MEPs favour a leading role for the EU Member States of the region in promoting enhanced cooperation with and within the region. They consider that Romania, Bulgaria and Greece, as EU Member States in the Black Sea region, can and should lead the way in this respect. The report recalls that a number of regional cooperation mechanisms are already in place in the Black Sea area and it underlines, therefore, the need for the EU and the Black Sea countries to coordinate activities and prevent duplication of effort. It stresses the need to set-up an NGO platform for the Black Sea with the aim of creating a framework for exchanges between the civil societies of the region.

Financing: to meet these objectives, adequate financial means are required. MEPs call for a rational use of Community financial instruments through better coordination of the European Neighbourhood and Partnership Instrument, the Structural Funds and the pre-accession funds available to the region. The Commission is called upon to make the decentralised financial instrument Small Project Funds available for people-to-people projects in the area of cross-border cooperation and to make special efforts to encourage the use of that instrument.