



Envisioning a sustainable Black Sea: the role of the ICBSS

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The Black Sea area constitutes an economic, geopolitical and trade hub, and serves as a crucial energy trade corridor connecting Asia with Europe. It includes twelve countries out of which six are littoral states (Bulgaria, Georgia, Romania, Russia, Turkey and Ukraine), while the rest (Albania, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Greece, Moldova and Serbia) are connected to it by historical, economic, environmental, social and cultural ties and legacies.

The region of the Black Sea is of global importance. Over the last decade, interest towards the Black Sea has grown and matured regionally and internationally, and it has become clear that part of the region's future will be driven by trends and developments in the areas of sustainable development, innovation, science and technology, but preferably also through the green development/growth concept. The current economic environment and the climate change impact bring the importance of the Black Sea Region to the fore, and create an urgent need for the adoption of a new plan for sustainable development.

Taking into account that sustainable development is based on the three main pillars of economic development, social cohesion, and environmental protection, it is important to promote multilateral cooperation among international stakeholders, regional players, the cross border cooperation peripheries and the business sector in order to set the conditions for climate and energy security, and a safe environment for investment and trade opportunities.

In this regard, the priorities of sustainable growth, innovation, and good governance that could strengthen the area's capacity and lead to the creation of a dynamic hub with multiplying effects in the wider Black Sea region should focus on:

1. The efficient use and management of natural resources with a special emphasis on (a) the vital energy sector and (b) the sustainable management of water resources/supply of the Black Sea.
2. Activating and enhancing human capital in Knowledge Networks. Promoting good governance by fostering cooperation with NGOs and civil society actors; supporting involvement in Knowledge and Innovation Networks (eg. the Horizon 2020); establishing training programmes; presenting best practises in research and innovation; and strengthening relations with educational institutions and young researchers that will be introduced to subjects concerning the Black Sea area.

3. Promoting a policy and target-oriented framework for the region's sustainable development prospects, with a particular emphasis on cross-border cooperation, trade, transport, and new investments, thus making parallel use of key policies such as 'green entrepreneurship', 'green transportations', etc.

4. Raising the visibility of the Black Sea area and the awareness of the international community towards it, and the BSEC specifically as of a reliable and resourceful partner.

In view of the contemporary needs of the region, the International Centre for Black Sea Studies (ICBSS), founded in 1998 as the official think-tank and related body of the Organisation of the Black Sea Economic Cooperation (BSEC), is fostering sustainable development, innovation and good governance as its primary objective, through the promotion of multilateral cooperation among the organisation of the BSEC, the BSEC member states and its related bodies, the European Union and other international organisations in key issues of common interest.

The Centre carries out a various number of activities including policy recommendations, research projects and publications in order to elaborate and promote this vision, fostering relations with multiple international partners.

Over the years, the ICBSS has evolved beyond its strictly institutional role and is at the forefront of research and analysis concerning the wider Black Sea region, while since 2010, the Centre has focused more actively on the environmental aspect of sustainable development.

Moving towards 'Greening the Black Sea' is the Centre's new perspective, one characterised by a focus on development, culture, as well as economic and social prosperity, one that goes beyond the traditional approach and makes the concept of sustainable development/greening, innovation, and governance our driving force. Thus, the environmental dimension runs through all of our actions and aims.

Within this framework, since 2011, the ICBSS has established a *Green Cluster of Knowledge Institutions of Black Sea: A Roadmap on Renewable Energy Sources and Energy Efficiency for Research and Academic Institutions*, in cooperation with the University - Higher School of Economics in Russia and the Marmara Research Center of the Scientific and Technological Research Council of Turkey.

The project's main objective was the voluntary implementation of a roadmap with an informative character that would provide recommendations for the application of innovative and specific tools in order to achieve environmental protection, sustainable development and ecological strategies, all based on success stories from the EU and good case stories from partner countries.

The roadmap aimed at the transfer of technology and know-how among the Black Sea Partners. The Green Cluster is a pioneer for the implementation of innovative technology that can promote and encourage energy efficiency, environmental awareness of the public and practices that have an impact on reducing gas emissions and consequently, the climate change impact. The starting point is a network of academic and research Institutions, committed to implement green practices.

Another way of achieving all that is through the creation of the *WEB-GIS Observatory Network for the Environmental and Sustainable Development of the Black Sea*. The Observatory that was funded by ICBSS is an established mechanism and a strategic tool that constantly gathers new statistical and geographical data of the region. It is an ongoing progress and aims at providing information services, data extraction, and production of customized thematic maps. It supports policy makers who need to compare data and similarities/differences between countries and provides valuable information to NGOs and local development agencies. It aims at providing focused knowledge regarding main figures of the area.

The Observatory provides data for geographical position, environment and natural assets, economic strength, social

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integration and accessibility. It is developed in a simple way in order for users to easily find and understand the features and data provided. One can insert queries of data and indicators to create a selection of them and according to this information, the application will display a thematic map.

The ICBSS promotes synergies across regions with the aim to foster sustainable and innovative policies for the environment, energy, transport, science and technology within the wider Black Sea region and beyond. The development of cooperation schemes and research networks constitutes the key element for growth, prosperity and longevity. Sustainable development should not be merely a choice but a way of living for the Black sea region and its peoples. ■