
Benita Ferrero-Waldner : We Need To Give A Regional Dimension To Our Bilateral Cooperation

Noyan Tapan - 26/2/2008

In an interview with Noyan Tapan, European Commissioner for External Relations and European Neighbourhood Policy, Benita Ferrero-Waldner presents the key features of the EU Black Sea Synergy Initiative

Q. - Please present briefly the main points of the Black Sea Synergy Initiative and its goals.

A. - Black Sea Synergy is a regional cooperation initiative of the European Union for the Black Sea region which aims at developing cooperation within the Black Sea region itself and between the region and the EU. Through the increased political attention at regional level and strengthening of ongoing cooperation Black Sea Synergy opens additional space for cooperation with Russia, Turkey and all eastern ENP partners.

Black Sea Synergy builds upon ongoing sector specific programmes of the EC cooperation programmes. Main areas include energy, transport, environment, trade, research and science, information technology, fishery and maritime management.

Q. - The conflicts inside and between the Black Sea region (or, as referred often, the Wider Black Sea) are usually mentioned as impeding their cooperation and preventing them to feel as members of a common region. Does the EU believe the initiative will help enhance cooperation among the countries of the region and settlement of the existing conflicts?

A. - Yes, I do. Even though it will be in an indirect way: Black Sea Synergy is not intended to substitute for the existing negotiation frameworks or to deal directly with these conflicts. Yet, Black Sea Synergy tackles the underlying causes of conflicts, which often include lack of economic development and lack of regional cooperation. Moreover, our Cross-border-cooperation Black Sea programme for 2007-2013 focuses on civil society, including people-to-people contacts, which in my view may be a key element to facilitate solutions for the conflicts you refer to; this is an EU programme very much at the core of the Black Sea Synergy initiative. Like the rest of EU policies towards countries suffering this kind of clashes, Black Sea Synergy is an indirect means to create climates in which current conflicts might be resolved and to prevent new conflicts from arising.

Q. - The initiative was presented last April. What is the reaction of the countries of the Black Sea region to the initiative? Are there any concrete projects? What are the perspectives seen?

A. - In preparing the Communication of April 2007, the European Commission consulted all Black Sea partners and the general reaction was positive.

There is broad agreement on the need for deeper EU involvement in the region and in defining the cooperation mechanisms, goals and priorities. We also agree on the main cooperation areas and the need for closer contacts with the Organisation of the Black Sea Economic Cooperation (BSEC), as well as with the other regional structures and initiatives active in the Black Sea area.

The European Commission has formulated a working programme for the coming years, identifying a large number of tasks. Some examples are the development

of sea transport, a regional dialogue on energy security, an environmental dimension, the spreading of the successful model of Danube-Black Sea cooperation on water management, civil protection cooperation, the implementation of a cross-border programme to strengthen civil society, fight against organized crime, a potential platform on migration issues, and the development of maritime policy cooperation and joint fisheries management.

Q- What incentives would the EU apply help the Black Sea Synergy initiative progress?

A. - Black Sea Synergy stresses the importance of regional cooperation for these countries. They know that stakes are high and do not need specific financial incentives to make the initiative work. Regional cooperation can deliver very positive results in the crucial areas targeted by Black Sea Synergy.

Black Sea Synergy has no specific fund. However, planned Community assistance to the non EU countries covered by Black Sea Synergy amounts to \approx 3.7 billion between 2007 and 2010. This means about \approx 920 million per year, which represents an overall increase of 41% compared to the period 2004-2006. We will stress the need to give a regional dimension to our bilateral cooperation in the region. In addition, the above mentioned EU Cross-Border cooperation Programme for the Black Sea 2007-2013 of \approx 17 Million will start later on in the year. Finally, countries around the Black Sea will also benefit from the Neighbourhood Investment Fund (\approx 700 million for the period 2007-2013) and from increased European Investment Bank lending (\approx 3.7 billion over the same period).

Ed. The interview took place shortly before the 14 February the first meeting of Black Sea Synergy at Ministerial level.

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