



## Press Release

### The Black Sea Conference of Regions

AER initiates a new approach at the territorial level to find solutions to the major problems faced by the Black Sea area: water and sustainable tourism

Paris (F), 16 February 2010.

For the first time, the Assembly of European Regions (AER) has gathered over 60 politicians and regional representatives of the Black Sea outline at Ile-de-France (F), among with some experts, to discuss two major areas of concern for the Black Sea: water management and sustainable tourism.

Being strategically located at the junction of Europe, Central Asia and the Middle East, and having a large population (the Danube-Black Sea Basin represents more than 160 millions people), the Black Sea area indeed faces a number of opportunities and challenges. *“Being the largest network of regions in wider Europe, it is the AER’s duty to facilitate relations between all existing stakeholders. This is the reason why I have decided to launch this initiative of inviting the thirty-three regions of the Black Sea outline, experts from the European Union, the Council of Europe, the Black Sea area, as well as scholars working on the topic, to meet and prepare the future of the region and protect its environment”* stated **Michèle Sabban**, AER President.

Regions are indeed becoming more and more crucial when it comes to the implementation of projects, whether these are related to water or energy. In order to fulfil such projects and answer the energy challenges with which Europe is faced today (water, energy, emissions...), regions need a clear understanding of the potential technical solutions and existing investment possibilities. Through this meeting, AER’s aim is to provide them with such information.

Participants have been able to discover existing initiatives, in particular in the Ukrainian Region of Odessa, and together have had the chance to establish a first diagnosis through an inventory of the organisations, tools and programmes useful to the common effort.

This event also allowed participants to get a better knowledge of the institutional basis that regional authorities must seek. The Commission on the Protection of the Black Sea Against Pollution is the regional body which coordinates efforts on environmental protection for the area. **Ahmet Kideys**, the executive director of its permanent secretariat located in Istanbul, stated that *“substantial efforts have been made by the contracting parties of the Commission jointly with relevant organisations, including the EC, in order to avoid adverse effects in the Black Sea ecosystem”*.

**Stephen Hart**, Water Sector Expert for the European Investment Bank, underscored the importance of adequate financing to lead successful projects. He stated that *“Many financing solutions already exist: pre-accession, neighbourhood policy, structural and cohesion funds, and even fiduciary funds. As the problem of water ignores borders, we are working on many projects outside the EU in the areas of energy and water. My advice to you today would be: if you want your application to be accepted, you really must ‘make’ a good project, with a clear-cut definition, including all stakeholders and specific responsibilities.”*

*“This conference is the first of hopefully many more events around the Black Sea and we will keep on sharing experiences and actions which will benefit the Regions of the Black Sea. I invite all interested stakeholders to join us in our next meeting in September. This initiative reflects the AER spirit to create synergies between Regions, our method of bringing them in direct relation to learn from each other, and make them gain efficiency.” concluded Michèle Sabban.*

## **Background**

The EU has initiated major efforts to stimulate economic and political reform through wide-ranging cooperation programmes, such as the Pre-Accession Instrument, the European Neighborhood Policy, the Black Sea Synergy and the Eastern Partnership. The Council of Europe, and in particular its Congress of Local and Regional Authorities, has also run many projects in the Black Sea, and have allowed for the creation of the Black Sea Euroregion.

In spite of positive developments over the last years, significant challenges have remained in key sectors such as environment, energy, or tourism remain, that require coordinated responses at the regional level.

All mentioned presentations will soon be available on AER's website: <http://www.aer.eu/en/events/standing-committee-on-institutional-affairs/2009/aer-black-sea-regional-policy-conference.html>

*The **Assembly of European Regions (AER)** is the largest independent network of regions in wider Europe. Bringing together more than 270 regions from 33 countries and 16 interregional organisations, AER is the political voice of its members and a forum for interregional co-operation.*

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