



PRESS RELEASE

AER 5th Black Sea Summit:

Using existing bridges to rise above new walls

Bucharest (RO), 3 October 2014

Bearing in mind the challenging political context that affects this area, the Assembly of European Regions (AER), at the kind invitation of the National Union of County Councils from Romania (UNCJR), held today its 5th annual Black Sea Summit in Bucharest, Romania. The 100 high level participants present during the Summit adopted the 'Bucharest Declaration', a political statement that focuses on the place of the Black Sea Synergy within the framework of the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP).

This year's edition of the Summit took the opportunity to welcome the Association agreements between the EU, Ukraine, Georgia and the republic of Moldova signed in July. This new step for these Black Sea regions recognises the importance of the involvement of the EU to promote a sound and fruitful cooperation within the area, but also highlights the work still needed to be done.

"We consider as urgent that a true Black Sea Strategy be put in place by the European Union, which would offer the ground for a much needed integrated approach of the area. A real synergy among the European policies must be ensured, in particular with regard to the Eastern Partnership and Danube cooperation programme, but also beyond, to keep important contacts with the Russian Federation." stated **Hande ÖZSAN BOZATLI**, AER President.

"Indeed, the political and security issues in Eastern Europe have led the Black Sea Basin and its regions to undergo a test period, particularly suspending numerous projects with Ukrainian regions. The UNCJR is prepared to further develop links with Ukraine using all the means provided by the Black Sea cooperation. I call all fellow neighbouring regions to do the same", declared **Marian OPRISAN**, President of UNCJR and President of the Vrancea County (RO).

Although the strategy for the Black Sea Basin Programme adopted by the participating countries in July represents a step in the right direction, AER is concerned that the areas for cooperation identified under each objective - whilst defined on the basis of an open consulting process and SWOT analysis - be very restrictive and too specific to encourage true cooperation. Therefore, AER through the Bucharest declaration, insists that support to cooperation and "people-to-people actions" through key fields such as Youth, education, social inclusion or health, would bring a strong contribution to the objectives of the programme, granting more equal opportunities directly to its citizens.

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“Central governments still have too much power which could be passed down to a more local level, in order to boost efficiency, dialogue and stability for the citizens that they represent,” mentioned Romanian Prime Minister **Victor-Viorel PONTA**. *“The principle of subsidiarity, which is the foundation of the European Union (EU), as well as the role of regional local authorities need to be enforced to better forge a strong, inclusive and flexible cooperation”*

Finally, President of the Committee of the Regions **Michel LEBRUN** reminded the participants of the Summit that regions of the Black Sea Basin already have the tools and necessary bridges to overcome the new obstacles, which they are currently facing. A pursued integrated approach and strengthened partnership between Black Sea regions will continue to foster cross-border cooperation.

The **Assembly of European Regions (AER – aer.eu)** is the largest independent network of regions in wider Europe. Bringing together regions from 35 countries and 15 interregional organisations, AER is the political voice of its members and a forum for interregional co-operation.

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