

DAILY NEWS to Members: 24/04/2007 by Lara Scarpitta

EU COMMISSION UNVEILS NEW STRATEGY FOR BLACK SEA REGION

On 11 April, with a Communication entitled “A Black Sea Synergy: a new regional cooperation initiative”, the European Commission launched a new strategy to boost the EU’s cooperation with energy-rich countries of the Black Sea Region. This new initiative, which targets the Eastern and Caucasus countries of the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP) and their neighbours, addresses regional cooperation in several key priority areas including Energy, Trade and Environment through more direct support to existing regional cooperation mechanisms. The Black Sea Synergy does not create a new institutional framework but it will bring added value to EU existing policies in the region.

The Black Sea region has acquired greater importance to the EU following the accession of Romania and Bulgaria, two Black Sea littoral states, on 1 January this year. The “Black Sea Synergy”, which targets the current partners of the ENP and their neighbouring countries, puts great emphasis on energy cooperation. According to the Commission Communication, the Black Sea Region is a “*production and transmission area of strategic importance for EU energy supply security*” offering “*significant potential for energy supply diversification and it is therefore an important component of the EU’s external energy strategy*”. Other key priorities include democracy, good governance, movement of people and security, research and education and the resolution of the region’s ‘frozen conflicts’.

With this new initiative the EU hopes to boost regional cooperation through increased regular contacts among the various countries within the framework of existing regional initiatives such as the Black Sea Economic Cooperation (BSEC) and the Baku Initiative, a multilateral energy initiative involving 14 countries of the Black Sea and Caspian Sea. According to the Communication, through the Baku Initiative the Commission will aim at achieving “*a clear, transparent and non-discriminatory framework*”, in line with the the EU rulebook – the *acquis communautaire* –, for energy production, transport and transit.

The EU is currently involved in the Black Sea Region through the ENP with Eastern European and Caucasus countries, the accession process with Turkey and a Partnership and Cooperation Agreement with Russia. However, the EU has clearly ruled out setting up new institutions, and regional cooperation will remain “complementary” to already existing policies and agreements in the region. The Commission has also pointed out that the ‘Black Sea Synergy’ will not have its own budget but will be supported by existing Community financial mechanisms such as the European Neighbourhood Instrument. The Commission hopes that EU leaders will endorse the initiative at their next Summit in June in Brussels.