



INSTITUTE FOR REGIONAL AND INTERNATIONAL STUDIES

BSYRF 2010

“Security, Development and Regional Cooperation in the Black Sea Area”

*April 15-18, 2010
Varna, Bulgaria*

CONFERENCE REPORT

On April 15-18, 2010, the Institute for Regional and International Studies (IRIS), Sofia, and the Centre for Applied Policy Research (C.A.P), Munich, organised the first conference that was part of the pilot issue of the project Black Sea Young Reformers Fellowship (BSYRF) - “Security, Development and Regional Cooperation in the Black Sea Area”. The event took place in the Black Sea resort of Golden Sands near Varna, Bulgaria, and was realised in partnership with the Black Sea Trust for Regional Cooperation (a project of the German Marshall Fund of the United States) and Germany’s Robert Bosch Stiftung.

The conference gathered 19 young politicians, civil servants and political analysts from the non-governmental sectors of Armenia, Azerbaijan, Bulgaria, Georgia, Moldova, Romania, Russia, Turkey and Ukraine as well as representatives of the host and partner organisations. In the span of three days, the participants presented and actively debated on topical problems concerning policy-making and development of the Black Sea region and tried to figure out ways in which those problems could be dealt with and in which the European Union can assist the region.

The conference was structured in the following way. There were three main discussion lines, along which all conference activities evolved: **institutional development**, **security** and **regional cooperation**. They were analytically approached from two perspectives – *current state of affairs* and *strategies for the future in terms of EU support*. One plenary session (attended by all participants) was dedicated to each of the three discussion areas, after which the participants were divided into three groups according to preference and corresponding to the discussion areas. Each group then formed a workshop to discuss problems and solutions in detail, in three separate workshop sessions. Then a follow-up plenary session, with all present, took place to allow rapporteurs from each workshop to summarise the discussions and conclusions arrived at. A fifth plenary dedicated to inter-conference activities and the forthcoming conference in Berlin closed the event.

The first day of the Varna conference began with welcoming speeches by the organisers and partners of BSYRF 2010. The participants were shortly addressed by Mr Mark Cunningham of the Black Sea Trust, Mr Carsten Lenk of the Robert Bosch Stiftung, Mr Joerg Forbrig of the German Marshall Fund of the United States and Ms Mirela Isic of C.A.P. Then Dr Ognyan Minchev, Executive Director of IRIS, presented a framework policy (position) paper on the issues the Black Sea region faces in terms of institutional development, security and regional cooperation and on ways the EU can support the region. The paper had been distributed to the participants prior to the conference and was to serve as a basis for discussion, critique and analysis throughout the conference’s work. It was to provoke the participants’ reaction and urge them to jointly think of policy solutions and ways of improvement of cooperation between the Black Sea and the EU.

After the position paper presentation, the first plenary session, focusing on Institutional development, began, chaired by Ognyan Minchev. Three presentations were held by three participants as follows: Ms Elene Khoshtaria, Georgian Deputy State Minister for European and Euro-Atlantic Integration, spoke about “Nation-building and institutional development in Georgia”; Tevan Poghosyan, Executive Director of the Yerevan-based International Centre for Human Development, provoked the participants with a exposé on “The role of civil society as one of the state’s institutions”; and Corneliu Ciurea of the Chisinau-based Institute for Development and Social Initiatives ‘Viitorul’ talked about “Institutional development in Moldova in a comparative perspective.” After the presentations there was a Q&A session and a discussion with the presenters in which all participants took part.

The second plenary session was dedicated to Security and was chaired by Joerg Forbrig. Fariz Ismailzade of the Azerbaijan Diplomatic Academy made an overview of the “Security challenges in the Black Sea area.” Then there was a snapshot presentation of a specific problem, “Russia’s Black Sea Fleet stationing and moving out of Sevastopol: How the EU could be involved in settling the issue,” by Dmytro Shulga of Ukraine’s International Renaissance Foundation. A very intriguing and useful juxtaposition of Black Sea with Baltic security was offered after that by Leonid Karabeshkin, chairman of the St. Petersburg-based NGO Baltic Club and a lecturer at Tallinn University. The three presentations were followed by a vibrant discussion.

The Regional cooperation plenary was chaired by Mark Cunningham. It began with an account of “Regional cooperation and governance issues in Turkey” by Levent Koc of the Turkish Economic and Social Studies Foundation. Ivane Chkhikvadze of the European Stability Initiative gave a more state-to-state relationship view in his presentation “Regional cooperation from a Georgian perspective,” and Rasul Naymanov of the North Caucasus’s Civil and Legal Enlightenment Club looked at “Social moderators in the North Caucasus as a regional initiative.” This session presented the participants with three really different angles on regional cooperation – intrastate, interstate and inter-regional cooperation.

After the plenary sessions, the participants were divided into three groups for each thematic workshop – Institutional development, Security and Regional cooperation – according to their preferences. Each workshop had three sessions. The purpose was to elaborate on specific problems in each discussion area and come up with a summary, policy solution proposals and suggestions for EU support in the process. Each workshop session was moderated by one or two participants, with occasional discussion stimulation by a project team member. The moderators were as follows: Institutional development workshop (Session 1 – Tevan Poghosyan and Elene Khoshtaria; Session 2 – Lucia Aprodu and Corneliu Ciurea; Session 3 – Virzhiniya Borisova and Igor Zhovkva); Security workshop (Session 1 – Mazhar Yasin Tuyluoglu; Session 2 – Gayane Sargsyan and Fariz Ismailzade; Session 3 – Roya Talibova); and Regional cooperation workshop (Session 1 – Sinem Acikmese and Mark Cunningham; Session 2 – Ivane Chkhikvadze; Session 3 – Dmytro Shulga and Levent Koc). Some participants chose to move from one workshop session to another in order to get a better grasp of the different topics.

A plenary session was held after the workshop sessions to give a chance to a representative from each of the three groups to present the results of their work. The last, fifth plenary session, was dedicated to overall evaluation of the conference and to sharing of ideas about the activities in the period before the Berlin conference. The participants also shared their expectations for the networking with EU representatives in Berlin.

Apart from the busy academic agenda in Varna, the participants could also enjoy a unique cultural and sightseeing programme provided by the organisers. One of the afternoons saw them take a bus sightseeing trip in the Golden Sands resort, visit the Old Roman Baths in Varna, the Old Varna Museum hosting a unique photograph collection of the city dating back to the beginning of the 20th century, attend a wine tasting session in the basement of the museum and have a traditional Bulgarian cuisine dinner at the Paraklisa restaurant in central Varna.