



EUROPEAN UNION



**EU
MISSIONS**

RESTORE OUR OCEAN & WATERS



Concrete solutions for our greatest challenges

MISSION "RESTORE OUR OCEAN AND WATERS BY 2030"

From the Danube source to Black Sea – Healthy Waters and healthy life

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Burgas Free University, Burgas, Bulgaria

Conclusions by Ivelina Vasileva, Mission Ocean & Waters Board member

There is a lot that I will take away from today's conference, dedicated to the Danube and the Black Sea. It has been a very enriching and inspiring event with amazing audience, active participants and interesting discussions. And I am proud that my home town Burgas, the town of a very strong marine community and the place where the Ministerial Declaration for the Black Sea Cooperation was signed in 2018, has been the host of this conference.

We are celebrating the EU Mission Restore our Ocean and Waters, which is a **powerful initiative**, a new way to bring concrete solutions to some of our greatest challenges – healthy waters and healthy life. It has ambitious goals and we need to deliver concrete results by 2030.

The **Mission is based on the principle of partnership and cooperation** and we've seen that today. It aims to mobilise and activate public and private actors, such as EU Member States, regional and local authorities, research institutes, fishermen, NGOs, entrepreneurs and investors to create real and lasting impact. Their representatives are here with us and this conference has been a demonstration that by connecting people and places with solutions and knowledge, the Mission is supporting key stakeholders to uptake new solutions and approaches.

We have witnessed a strong wave of support to the Mission. Key organizations have adhered to the Charter – the Ministries of Environment of Bulgaria and Romania, Burgas regional and local authorities, the Burgas Free University and schools. During the span of the day other regional and local administrations have committed to the Charter as well.

We've been talking about the Danube and the Black Sea and **the Danube and Black Sea Lighthouse** is a good example of protection and restoration of the marine and freshwater ecosystems and biodiversity and of promotion of blue economy. It could be further multiplied and spread over the whole European Union.

We acknowledge that the **Danube Basin** includes territories of 19 European countries and is recognized as the **most international river basin** in the world. It is the home of 83 million people with a wide range of cultures, languages and historical backgrounds. The ecosystems of the Danube River Basin are highly valuable in environmental, economic, historical and social terms.

The Black Sea on its side is a unique sea basin, rich in biodiversity, geological and cultural heritage, which is subject to combined effects of natural and human-induced stressors. There are six littoral countries, and nearly 160 million people live in the coastal area around the sea. Ten large rivers flow into the Black Sea and the Danube is one of them.

So, it is about people and about nature.

Probably the most serious challenge before the status of the Danube and the Black Sea is **climate change**.

At the same time **anthropogenic pressure** is rising. The negative impacts lead to:

- Loss of habitats and biodiversity;
- Chemical pollution;

- Physical damage of the bottom of the river and sea;
- Noise pollution;
- Plastic and microplastic waste and
- Unsustainable fishery.

Handling these challenges requires **great responsibility and joint efforts**, because marine and freshwater habitats are very complex and fragile ecosystems. They need a break from human interference. Ending marine and freshwaters pollution is essential for their long-term wellbeing.

We must unlock the enormous potential for the development of the sectors of blue economy too.

In the start of a **new political cycle** the policies related to the ocean and waters are gaining more importance for the European Union. For the first time we will have **Commissioner for Fisheries and Oceans** and a Commissioner responsible for the water resilience. Framing the work during the mandate of the Fisheries and Oceans Commissioner will be the new **European Ocean Pact**. It will ensure coherence across all policy areas linked to the oceans. Building on the Mission Restore our Ocean and Waters the Commissioner will develop an **EU Oceans Research and Innovation Strategy**. I am excited with the new political cycle, because this is an opportunity for politicians to engage more. And I am glad that the Bulgarian new commissioner will have the Mission in her portfolio.

We are now in the second year of the implementation phase of the Mission and we realize that we need more effective and urgent actions. We've gone far by setting up the structures and engaging targeted resources. We have ambitious objectives. We also have the legal obligations stemming from the EU legislation and the international commitments. We've seen today different stakeholders, students and young people and there is a ground for hope because **there is energy and mobilization**. But there is a lot more to be done and a longer way to go.

The participants in the conference agreed that we must follow the resource to the sea approach. International participation and cooperation are important means to drive us to our goals. We need to rely on research and innovation and progress by turning data into knowledge. This way we will develop new solutions and will scale them through. It is pivotal to establish synergies between different programs and projects, stimulate cross-cutting activities and share best practices. We have to get closer to communities and support the people whose livelihood, economy and cultures are the subject of transformation, put the knowledge in their hands and engage them, always keeping the youth perspective. This is our future.

In conclusion, we need to **boost adherence to the Charter** with more actions and we need to have **strong ownership of the Mission**. This will lead us to long-term stability and success!