

PARLIAMENTARY ASSEMBLY OF THE BLACK SEA ECONOMIC COOPERATION
PABSEC

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THE CULTURAL, EDUCATIONAL AND SOCIAL AFFAIRS COMMITTEE

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Report

on

JOINT RESEARCH PROGRAMME

ON THE HISTORY OF THE

BLACK SEA BASIN

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1. INTRODUCTION

The First Meeting of the PABSEC Cultural, Educational and Social Affairs Committee held in Istanbul on 5 November, 1993 adopted the proposal to include the Joint Research Programme on the History of the Black Sea into the agenda of the Second Meeting in order to recommend it for approval by the General Assembly.

The text of the proposal has been circulated as part of the Report of the First Meeting of the Committee (Doc. CC(1)15/93) and then as part of the Draft Minutes of the First Meeting (Doc.CC(2)33/93).

2. THE BLACK SEA BETWEEN HISTORY AND PRESENT

The Black Sea has always been a converging area for nations, states and civilisations controlling its riparian regions and their resources or fighting for the right to share it. Along its multi-millenary history, very much like other seas, the Black Sea has been a unifying factor within the diversity, a linking bond among inhabitants on its shores, fostering the exchange of goods together with cultural and political contacts. In spite of numerous contributions to the regional history of the Black Sea , the topic still calls for further and advanced search work in order to better put it into light.

The regional role assumed by the Black Sea acquired at times universal accents, especially when it acted as bond between the European world and the Asian one. Both the regional and the universal functions assumed by the Pontic basin require further investigation for a thorough understanding of their deep significance.

The effort to inquire into this important segment of universal history has revealed the various steps and aspects of its developments, though unequally. This gives ground for the carrying on of more and better elaborated monographic research on the most relevant aspects linked to the history of the Black Sea for the correct and thorough understanding of the function it has assumed throughout the ages. We should only mention as examples: the evolution of the main settlements on the Black Sea coasts: the economic activity of the riparian countries and the relations established with farther regions: various solutions to the commercial exploiting of the resources of the Black Sea (a closed sea under a regime of monopoly in the Byzantine and Ottoman periods, an open sea in the Genoese and Venetian period, and different other mixed formulae adopted in modern and contemporary times); the history of Pontic navigation: the evolution of relations among the Pontic powers according to their diverging or converging interests: the cultural evolution of the Pontic basin: sedentary and migratory communities: people of the steppe and people of the sea: acculturation in the Black Sea basin.

A systematic approach to these fields, as well as to the many others which have not been mentioned, would surely consolidate the historical knowledge concerning the Black Sea and would certainly ease the way into deeper understanding its universal function within the frame of the universal history. It would also yield further data liable to put into light its position as the converging area , at certain historic times, between Central Asia and the Far East on the one hand, and the European world on the other, its function of " turntable" for trading activities, if we are to use the well inspired-formula launched by a Romanian historian (Gheorghe I. Bratianu). Special attention is worth to be devoted to the issue of the continental regions which actually provided the means for the Pontic space to exert its specific influence upon both Europe and Asia.

The updating and the thorough examination of these aspects exhibited by the history of the Pontic basin and of many others prone to be brought into focus by the research work calls for coordinated and efficient effort on the part of specialists in various fields, based on the steady use of the interdisciplinary approach. A first step would necessarily consist in putting together a set of working tools - catalogues and bibliographies - of vital importance in carrying through special studies concerning the specific aspects of the Pontic basin. A special effort should be directed towards consolidating the documentary basis for the history of the Black Sea (archaeological, diplomatic and narrative sources, cartographic ones, etc.

In order to achieve this goal it set its sights on, a research group has been organised within the Institute of History "Nicolae Iorga" of Bucharest which has already initiated the elaboration of special monographic studies concerning certain aspects linked to the history of the Black Sea (for want of financial means and specialised staff, the investigation has been limited to the Byzantine domination, the Italian thalassocracies - Genoa and Venice - and also to the initial stage of the Ottoman domination). The research studies which are being considered, and we should mention here that among these quite a few are fairly advanced, target the policy of the Western Mongol Empires (the Golden Horde and the Mongol state of Persia) adopted towards the Pontic basin, various aspects of the Byzantine policy during the gradual fall of the Byzantine monopoly over the Pontic trade, the policies of Venice and Genoa in the Black Sea prior to and following the Byzantine restoration at the Straits (1261), the policy of the Ottoman power in the Black Sea , with a special focus on the Danube's mouth and the Imperial control over the lower course of the river. Previous research on the continental roads of international trading which used to link the Pontic basin to the heart of Asia and the central part of Europe is also being reviewed and consolidated.

For the step to follow, the members of this research team have paid a special attention to carrying out some preliminary research work , the elaboration of a primary working tool:

Bibliografia istoriei Marii Negre. I. Contributia romaneasca ("The Bibliography of the History of the Black Sea. I. The Romanian Contribution"), liable, through a broadened international cooperation , to extend to the other riparian countries and even to all historical schools having contributed to the development of the Pontic studies; the preparing and editing of a Collection of Studies, possibly a periodic publication, concerning various periods and aspects of the Pontic basin.

There is little doubt that a fundamental review of the history of the Black Sea will be entirely dependent on a large-scale international cooperation and on the extension of the interdisciplinary research work. The successful results yielded by these projects could later gradually turn the present team of Romanian researchers into the nucleus for an international centre which would ensure a more systematic and uninterrupted research effort devoted to the Pontic basin as viewed in all its historical and contemporary dimensions.

In order to lay the foundation for an international cooperation in the fields targetted by us, the summoning of a number of conferences in the years to come is being considered, which certainly would be attended by highly reputed experts on Pontic research. Such a meeting would necessarily have to focus on elaborating the research strategy for the near future and on setting up priorities in the research work to be undertaken.

The thorough understanding of the history of a certain geographical region and of its civilisation is obviously a precondition to be met to successfully pave the way for its present and hopefully for its future. We dare to say that a broadened cooperation among the riparian countries on the Black Sea coast nowadays and the organisation of their further collaboration might be taken as a duty. It is the way to reach their highest in the effort to acquire a better knowledge of their historic destiny.

3. THE RESEARCH PROGRAMME

The team of researchers in the Institute of History "N.Iorga" whose activity is dedicated to the history of the Black Sea will focus its efforts in the following years on promoting scholarly investigation concerning the past of this important area of Eurasian economic and cultural interference. A large-scale international cooperation of the specialists from various countries will contribute to a better understanding of the Black Sea question and of its international function and dimension from the ancient times to the present days.

1 The first purpose of this team is to prepare and publish every year , beginning with 1994, a volume of contributions dedicated to various aspects and periods of the history of the Black Sea. The publication of those contributions will pave the way to the elaboration of a comparative synthesis dedicated to this important segment of the world history (five volumes in the period 1994-1998).

2. The team of researchers will also promote on a national level the elaboration and publication of a series of specialised bibliographies dedicated to the history of the Black Sea. First to be published will be the Romanian Historical Bibliography of the Black Sea (in 1996).

3. Current bibliographies will cover the recent publications concerning the Black Sea history in order to make available to the specialists the most recent results of the research.

4. A catalogue of the available maps of the Black Sea from the ancient to the modern times will be prepared during the next five years.

5. One or two international symposiums on the Black Sea will be organised in the next five years with the participation of specialists from various countries in order to put the foundations to a History of the Black Sea.

6. Investigations in the archives and libraries will be promoted in order to enlarge the basic documentation of the future researches concerning the history of the Black Sea.

The research centre to monitor this programme is located in the Institute of History "N.Iorga", Bucuresti, Bd. Aviatorilor 1, tel./fax (401) 3110371.

4. THE COSTS OF THE PROGRAMME

In order to cover financially the costs of the above mentioned activities, an approximate sum of 100,000 US\$ is needed.

The costs will be covered by individual Black Sea countries involved within the framework of already existing and planned national, bilateral and multilateral programmes and projects; at the same time possibilities will be explored to seek financial support from the BSEC, as well as from other organisations and private sources. It is hoped that the PABSEC national delegations will endeavour to help identify possible sources of financing for this important project.