

Opening Remarks

of Mr. Lazăr Comănescu, Minister of Foreign Affairs at the Launching Event of the Black Sea and Central Asian Economic Outlook 2008

(Bucharest, June 23rd, 2008)

Distinguished guests,

Your excellencies,

Ladies and gentlemen,

It gives me great pleasure to welcome you in Bucharest, at the official launching event of the Black Sea and Central Asian Economic Outlook and to address such a distinguished audience.

Let me begin by congratulating and thanking all those who contributed to the project, particularly the OECD Developing Center and the Governing Board who politically backed the initiative. I would also like to thank the governments of Turkey and Greece which, together with the Romanian government, provided important political and financial support for this outlook. Last but not least our thanks go to the Black Sea Economic Cooperation Organization, which proved to be a valuable regional partner and the network of local partners who provided substantial input into this report.

Romania attaches great importance to the Black Sea and Central Asia regions, both in terms of its national foreign policy objectives and as a EU member state.

We are therefore particularly pleased to see that these two regions have become priority topics on the OECD agenda. Our meeting today is a most convincing proof on this respect.

Ladies and gentlemen,

The OECD is not only the association of the 30 most industrialized countries, but also an effective forum for policy analysis, recommendation, and consensus-building. Its capacity to undertake research and analysis on macroeconomic policies is widely recognized.

Moreover, the Organization has a key role in setting the international economic architecture and not least in better responding to the challenges of globalization. It has been therefore only natural for Romania to develop a strong cooperation with OECD. Indeed the organization, by providing valuable guidelines, helped us a lot in implementing reform policies in key economic areas such as investment, competition, development, labor market, Small and Medium Enterprises and many others.

We look forward to further strengthening our cooperation while pointing out very clearly that our objective is OECD full membership.

As I have already pointed out, we have an already strong cooperation with the OECD's working bodies and instruments; the country is witnessing a strong internal economic development stimulated by the EU accession. Romania is playing an increasing role, political and economic, in neighbouring regions. Moreover, we consider that the EU membership and the cooperation with the OECD, in the perspective of accession, are two complementary processes that sustain each other and multiply their effects.

I hear there and there voices that accession into OECD of all new EU member states would in some way affect the balance inside OECD, with too many European countries. There is also a different argument: Romania is not only interested in benefiting from the work of OECD but equally in adding its resources and expertise to the know-how of the Organization. Today's event is a point of our readiness to engage more with OECD projects.

Ladies and gentlemen,

The Black Sea region has been, until rather recently, like a missing piece of the puzzle within the EU's neighborhood. The complexity of problems in this area played its role in shaping a cautious European approach, notably since problems seem too often to have dominated opportunities, in the Western perception of our region.

There are still many challenges to be tackled in the Black Sea region. Some of the most urgent are the regional frozen conflicts, fighting against asymmetrical threats, and the need to eradicate poverty and to consolidate democracy or environmental protection in the region.

However, the region has a huge potential for a sustainable economic development and for prosperity.

We believe in an open, inclusive and project-oriented approach to Black Sea cooperation. We remain committed to promoting a multidimensional approach, which includes a complementary, non-institutionalized dimension to regional cooperation, concerning all matters of common interest.

Our aim has been to contribute to a secure, stable and prosperous Black Sea region. Drawing on the firm belief that common challenges can only be addressed in common, Romania supports the consolidation of BSEC as well as increasing its dynamism through a more efficient economic cooperation and a project-oriented approach.

Cooperation is not limited, though, to intergovernmental formats. With the aim of diversifying and revitalizing regional dialogue, in 2006, we launched the Black Sea Forum for Dialogue and Partnership, a flexible and inclusive platform of dialogue and of project-based partnerships. We have supported the creation of the Black Sea Trust, a German Marshall Fund initiative, in Bucharest, and we look forward to hosting the headquarters of the Black Sea Euroregion.

We have contributed to and welcomed the launch of the EU's Black Sea Synergy. This EU initiative is indeed of paramount importance to the region and we are ready to play an active role in promoting projects according to its principles and priorities, in the fields of environment, migration and civil society capacity building. Joining forces with countries in the region, both EU and non - EU members, remains vital for the future of the region. We invite all states in the region to become our partners in implementing projects under the Black Sea Synergy.

Ladies and gentlemen,

The strategic location of the wider Black Sea region is instrumental in providing access to international transport and energy routes linking Europe and Central Asia, helping trade and investment flourish. The sustainable development of the latter region can be achieved only through joint efforts and transparent cooperation, with EU playing a crucial part in this respect. An important step has already been taken with the European Union's Strategy towards Central Asia, which represents a constructive model oriented towards the future. Romania was actively involved in the elaboration of this strategy and is currently engaged in the implementation phase, especially in areas such as energy, transport or environment.

Romania attaches a particular attention to the development of comprehensive relationships with countries in Central Asia and to supporting their efforts in implementing economic and

democratic reforms. I have recently paid a visit to Turkmenistan and I was impressed by the desire and potential for further cooperation that Ashgabat officials conveyed to me.

We strongly believe that opening up new areas of cooperation and intensifying the existing ones will result in political and economic benefits for all parties involved. We therefore support the development of new transit corridors between Central Asia and Europe for transport, energy and commodities, as well as the enhancement of cultural and educational exchanges. These will foster a better mutual understanding and will greatly increase the international and regional standing of Central Asian states.

Ladies and gentlemen,

We have welcomed the initiative of having a study on the Black Sea and Central Asian economies, as it strengthened the perspective of having aggregated data and informed analysis on desirable economic policies in two dynamic regions that are evolving from centralized to open economies in a globalised, interdependent world.

By promoting this project we reaffirm the importance attached by Romania to the Black Sea and Central Asian regions and their potential for economic intra- and inter-regional cooperation and development. At the same time, we hope that the project will facilitate dialogue between policy makers, civil society and communication professionals at the national and regional levels.

The study, "Promoting Work and Well-being", brings to surface sensitive issues such as migration, employment, labor market, job opportunities, informality or household's responses and coping mechanism, which directly impact upon economic prosperity.

Since the various topics of the study will be presented in more detail by the next speakers, I will only address in a few words the migration dimension.

As an EU Member, Romania shares the European view on the need for opening up to the global world. Romania is well aware of the growing importance of migration to increasing competitiveness and economic efficiency – one of the Lisbon Strategy objectives. In this context, Romania supports the measures proposed for setting up common European conditions of entry for highly qualified Non-EU Member Country nationals, the Blue Card directive, which follow on the track of previous initiatives such as the legislation on admitting third states' citizens for purposes of study, pupil exchange, unremunerated training or voluntary service.

At the same time, Romania considers that such measures should not lead to a situation where local potential is overlooked. The due respect of the Community preference principle in employing new work force in the Member States should remain a pillar of EU core values.

Nevertheless, from its regional perspective, Romania is greatly interested in enhancing the current approach and continuous cooperation of the European Union towards the neighboring regions in the East. We supported and promoted the first pilot projects for applying EU cooperation instruments with these regions.

In concrete terms, Romania is a front-runner in the process of establishing a Black Sea Cooperation Platform in the field of migration and development, which underlines the need of enhancing the link between migration and development, as well as bettering the relation between EU and this region in terms of legal migration, including labour.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Given the abovementioned arguments, Romania supports the continuation of the OECD Development Centre's Black Sea Central Asia Economic Outlook in the following years.

Therefore, I invite the representatives of the public and private sector attending the event to explore and identify ways to advance and implement projects which can benefit from the conclusions and recommendations provided in the 2008 outlook. In this endeavor, I can assure you of the full support of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Romania.

Thank you very much for your attention.