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REPORT

Of Dr. Yordan Gospodinov, General Secretary of BISAC On the meeting with Mr. Abdellah Srur in Rome

On 5th September 2017, we had a meeting with Mr. Abdellah Srur – Executive Secretary of the General Fisheries Commission for the Mediterranean and Black Sea (GFCM). The meeting was organized at the request of the BISAC, and the topics for discussion and participants had been coordinated in advance. These were advised to the Headquarters of GFCM in advance.

The meeting was held as follows:

- Manaila Sorin – Chairman of the BISAC;
- Dr. Yordan Gospodinov – General Secretary of the BISAC;
- Abdellah Srur – Executive Secretary of GFCM;
- Nicola Ferri – In charge of fisheries (institutional and legal issues);
- Miguel Bernal – In charge of fish stocks at the 'Fisheries' Department of GFCM;
- Interpreter fro/into Bulgarian and English.

We discussed the following topics with Mr. Abdellah Srur:

1. Expansion of the areas under Natura 2000 in the Black Sea region;
2. Increase in the turbot quotas as a result of the recovery of the fish stocks;
3. Catches of veined rapa whelk – an invasive species;
4. Lack of fishing infrastructure;
5. Catches of veined rapa whelk and bivalves;
6. Authorized and prohibited fishing gear;
7. The 'BlackSea4Fish' project.

Mr. Manaila reported on all the topics, and afterwards I added to the report in view of my competence, focusing on some specifics of the Black Sea in terms of the Bulgarian shores, stocks, catches, fishing gear used, specifics of the Bulgarian legislation, capacity of the fishing fleet, fishing ports and the processing sector.

Regarding the first topic, I emphasized the fact that the currently determined areas under Natura 2000 off the Bulgarian shores completely or partially overlap with the traditional fishing areas, used for fishing for centuries. I explained that at this stage, these areas have not been

coordinated with the actual fisheries sector and no assessment has been made of the economic and social effect on the people engaged in small-scale fishing, commercial fishing, and the processing industry, providing employment to many people with a low economic status. I insisted that GFCM should, if possible, recommend and propose practices and opportunities so that fishing activity could be carried out in these areas and the local fish stocks could be used, as well as those coming in through the Bosphorus and usually located near the shores, stocks which feed well in the autumn and after spending a few months in the Black Sea return to the other seas south of the Bosphorus.

As regards the topic of the turbot quotas, I added that the last two reports on turbot stocks off the Bulgarian shores were good. I also pointed out that fishermen believe the stocks of turbot are greater than they have ever seen before. I made it clear that the turbot stocks were not ours exclusively, since turbot migrates and its migration pattern is still not clear. I proposed that a global study of the stocks in the Black Sea should be carried out, and an increase in the quotas for Bulgaria and Romania of 150 tons each should be recommended, if turbot stocks are really sustainable and it can safely be assumed that 20% of catch will not affect turbot reproduction and population. Mr. Miguel Bernal stated that it would be better to determine protected areas for turbot where this species could reproduce safely. This is a priority for determining stocks, which can be assisted by a working group. Mr. Srur stated categorically that the institutional aspect was very important, and cooperation with all institutions concerned had to be established. Clearly defined zones and protection of young species – this was agreed at the Bucharest convention, accepted and signed by the ministers. Stocks constitute one entity, and the maximum total allowable catch (TAC) will be determined, with the stakeholders being all Black Sea countries engaged in catching trout. For the first time in 2018, countries that are not EU members will also have quotas.

As regards the catches of veined rapa whelk, I expressed my opinion that at depths exceeding 15 m, there is no other fishing method than using beam trawls, and I also focused on the fact that the veined rapa whelk is an invasive species and as a result the stocks of bivalves are decreasing at a fast rate. Emphasized the need for further research into this species aimed at determining the extent to which the use of beam trawls affects other demersal species, the habitats, and the social-economic effect of possible actions and determining zones.

The representatives of the management of GFCM agreed with us and assured us that they would support us, provided we had the respective research findings on the impact of the beam trawl on the seabed.

As regards the authorized and prohibited fishing gear used for catching bivalves, I pointed out that mussels in the Mediterranean are caught using big fishing boats with powerful engines and various types and modifications of dredges, which can be observed in real time, while in Bulgaria small fishing boats are used or bivalves are caught by hand using selective fishing gear, a modification of the European gear, and Regulation 1967/2006 specifies exceptions to the dredges that are not considered towed fishing gear. I pointed out that despite the fishing gear for catching mussels, as described in the EU regulations, there are no such descriptions in our Fisheries and Aquaculture Act (FAA), and all trawling gear is considered dredges and is therefore prohibited.

Mr. Srur explained that if we send a letter to GFCM with a well-justified request regarding fishing gear, a discussion will be initiated and the necessary investigations into ships and gear used for fishing will be carried out, and an assessment of the gear that is authorized or prohibited will be made.

I shared our concerns regarding data collection, expressed my opinion and proposed that fishermen should be involved in the collection of data as this could have a beneficial effect because this will be a direct data collection method, which will have a good social-economic effect on the activities of fishermen.

In response to our request, the Executive Secretary of GFCM assured us of the support from GFCM. We were advised to consult DG MARE, Mr. Machado in particular, in order to sign a cooperation agreement with GFCM, similar to the one signed between the Mediterranean Advisory Council (MEDAC) and GFCM.

Mr. Srur recommended that we should ask DG MARE to invite us to the meeting in Zagreb at which the turbot quotas will be determined.

With regard to the BlackSea4Fish project – whose manager is the Bulgarian researcher Violin Raykov, we discussed the need to work in closer cooperation and to take advantage of the opportunities the project will provide.

The main objectives of the BISAC at this meeting were the following:

- To present ourselves so that we can be known, and to explain the main problems faced by the fisheries sector in the two countries: Bulgaria and Romania;
- To request the support of GFCM for solving the main problems faced by the fisheries sector in Romania and Bulgaria.

We achieved our objectives and gained the support of GFCM.

Attained results:

We raised the issues that are common for Bulgaria and Romania, emphasized them and asked for assistance in solving them. We were assured of the support of GFCM and were given guidance as to how to solve the specified problems.

Dr. Gospodinov, General Secretary of the Black Sea Advisory Council

10.09.2017.