

Personal opinions: Some thoughts about the Black Sea* (SESAME Black Sea cruise, R/V "AEGEO", October 7-13, 2007)

The Black Sea is truly an unique environment, as inspirationally characterized by the well known Russian oceanographer N. Knipovich early last century.

This consideration stands not only from the naturalistic point of view, but also spiritually, when considering *ab initio* the cosmopolite Black Sea universe.

Oceanographically, the Black Sea is an annex of the Mediterranean, identified as Mare Nostrum (our sea) by the Romans.

Moving in time, from the first colonizations and occupations, the history added various civilizations and development stages, one following the other, from the antique Greek / Roman, Italian, Turkish, Russian to the present day.

Besides the ethnic diversity around the Black Sea, different religions are similarly represented.

According to a notorious Romanian historian, for Romania, this Latin island in a Slavic sea, the Black Sea has always represented its best neighbour.

For me, born in our wonderful Carpathian Mountains, the sea has represented a real attraction and challenge.

After graduating the Faculty of Biology in one of Romania's most pleasant university centres Cluj-Napoca, I became little by little a marine biologist.

Of course, the considerable change, in all respects, existential, social, personal, from mountains to the sea, has not been always easy, but in spite all constrains and difficulties, I've never regretted my choice.

Sailing now again on our Black Sea, I cannot refrain from remembering many other events and moments, since 1970 until today, experienced in former times on board Romanian and Russian and more recently American research vessels.

This present new experience on board the Greek R/V "AEGEO" is certainly another great achievement and opportunity, allowing me to stick again to my first love in marine radiobiology, namely, the assessment of planktonic primary production by means of the C-14 method.

Putting aside my own professional qualification, one can not ignore nowadays the evolution of this particular marine environment, and its contemporary trends, from the environmental viewpoint.

The stronger and stronger evidence and awareness about the ecological crises and disequilibrium in this basin, severely impacted by a huge freshwater input originating in the vast Danube river watershed plus those of Dnieper, Dniester, Bug a.o., within the last five to six decades, has led scientists to warn about the possibility to face a dead sea in near future.

Among the major dangers affecting the innocent Black Sea, for me, the constant decline of marine biodiversity is obviously the most dramatic aspect.

To stick to a single example, in Romanian coastal waters alone over 50% of the former impressive or delicate green, brown and red seaweeds (macroscopic pluricellular algae) have disappeared, maybe forever, compared to the 1940s.

Many other similar examples of decline could be given with respect to the whole Black Sea concerning invertebrates and fish.

How many beautiful and ecologically or economically valuable species, both floral and faunal now remain only in handbooks or souvenirs?!?

What an irreversible pity.

Nevertheless, eutrophication - still the major disease of the Black Sea – is going to diminish. Water quality slightly improves, some fauna components enriched again their populations or stocks, seagulls and dolphins are still around. No more sea lions, on cliffs and beaches, unfortunately!

Anyway, in such happy moments of successful scientific cooperation, positive feelings and emotions do prevail.

And considering and counting on all ongoing joint commitments and various initiatives at many levels, concerning the Black Sea, the believe and hope to save it before it's not going to be too late is probably guiding most of us now.

Let's believe that every future sunrise will bring us a cleaner Black Sea and a better mutual understanding regardless of nationality, religion, personal convictions.

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* Short reflections requested by Mr. Stamos Birsim for the documentary movie dedicated to the EC / FP6 joint research project SESAME related scientific cruise on board Greek R/V "AEGAEON" between October 7-13, 2007.