



Policy Brief #2 September 2006

BSEC AT FIFTEEN: Enhancing Effectiveness through Better Performance and Meaningful Institutional Reform

By Nicolae Ecobescu*

The aim of this paper is, first, to present some considerations about the centrality of the Organisation of the Black Sea Economic Cooperation (BSEC) in the architecture of cooperation, security and stability in the Black Sea space. Second, it is an attempt to produce a general assessment of the Organisation's performance during its fourteen years of existence. Third, it is to advance several ideas concerning the expanded role of the BSEC in the years ahead. In other words, the main purpose of the paper is to formulate a series of suggestions which, if accepted and implemented, could contribute toward enhancing the effectiveness of the BSEC through better functional performance and meaningful institutional reform.

I

When speaking about the centrality of the BSEC in the affairs of the Black Sea region, one is well advised to take into consideration several essential reference points. First, it is a fact that the BSEC is the first intergovernmental organisation that has been created in the area, without any similar precedent. Second, the Organisation's eminently positive objective has been the development of economic cooperation among the participating states as a key factor for the progress and well-being of their peoples. Third, the member states' commitment to build their relationships and the supporting institutions for their cooperation on the bedrock principles of international law as enshrined in the UN Charter and other legally binding international instruments. Fourth, the Organisation's contribution to mutual understanding, security and stability in the region. Finally, the fact that the

* Ambassador Nicolae Ecobescu is Director of the Romanian Institute of International Studies (IRSI), EURISC Foundation, Bucharest.

Responsibility for the views expressed in the Policy Briefs lies exclusively with authors.



other existing cooperative mechanisms in the area cannot in any way be compared to the BSEC in terms of representative character and international recognition.

Certainly, the BSEC is not a regional organisation *stricto sensu*, in a narrow interpretation of the terminology used in chapter VIII of the UN Charter. In fact, when we consider the geographical area actually covered by the Organisation of the Black Sea Economic Cooperation and the respective territories of its component states, the BSEC rather appears to be a cross-regional organisation, if we are to apply the typology proposed in a recent publication (“Operational focus on one region but whose membership extends beyond it”).¹ Indeed, in addition to the six littoral states of the Black Sea, the BSEC comprises other six states located either east or west of the Black Sea. Nevertheless, this circumstance in no way affects the institution’s regional character. Therefore, further reference to the BSEC as a regional organisation corresponds to the typology used by UN Security Council, which has identified three categories of intergovernmental organisations: international, regional and sub-regional.

The existence of the BSEC, on the other hand, does not amount to a regional monopoly, in the sense of precluding the emergence and functioning of other cooperative arrangements or structures in the area. In this respect, it is useful to recall that, after a number of years during which the Black Sea region was virtually ignored, in recent years it has started to enjoy the increased attention and interest of important actors from outside the area. This change of attitude, insomuch as it is not motivated exclusively by interests extrinsic to the region, is a salutary new development. Quite a few proposals and initiatives with regard to the Black Sea space have been launched recently; others are in preparation. In the process of evaluating such initiatives, I think that it is necessary to consider several key criteria and requirements, including the degree to which they express the interests and preferences of the states within the region itself, not merely the interests of outside actors in global political games. Another factor is the likelihood of such proposals to be accepted by the states belonging to Black Sea region as an expression of their own interests. Yet another is to avoid duplication or in any way undermining the existing cooperative mechanisms, in particular those of the most important regional intergovernmental organisation in the area – the BSEC. Otherwise, this kind of exercise, regardless of its motivation, runs the risk of generating an unnecessary element of confusion. At the same time, it is important to stress that, according to recently adopted Bucharest Statement: *BSEC towards Its 15th Anniversary*, the Observer states have the possibility to enhance their contribution to the BSEC activities through their participation, together with the member states, in “the elaboration and implementation of certain projects, relevant for the Black Sea Region, as well as for some adjacent zones”, notably in six specific fields.

II

During its 14 years of “dynamic existence” (to quote again the Bucharest Statement), the BSEC has scored some significant achievements. Worth mentioning, first of all, is the progress made toward consolidating its legal status, by the ratification of the basis BSEC Charter, as well as its rapid institutional ex-



pansion. Obviously, one cannot ignore its contributions to the promotion of economic cooperation and constructive interaction in various other domains. But the purpose of the present paper is not to focus mainly on the successful accomplishments of the Organisation. One year from now, the 15th anniversary Summit in Istanbul will offer a good opportunity to make a substantive overall evaluation of the BSEC work so far, including its concrete sectoral and institutional performance. Consequently, at this stage it is much more important to focus our attention on those things that need to be done in order to prepare a new phase in the life of the BSEC, with considerably more tasks and enhanced responsibilities to enable it to cope with the requirements and challenges of the 21st century.

At this juncture, it seems, therefore, quite normal to ask essential questions about the BSEC performance, this being a basic criterion for the appreciation of its concrete achievements. To answer this question, one should go further and explore the quality of that performance. Was it “high performance”, “moderate performance” or “low performance”? To be fair, I consider that the first and the third hypotheses should be excluded. It seems to me that the second level, that of “moderate performance” will be applicable in the case of the BSEC. Obviously, even in the absence of an objective and impartial evaluation based on measurable facts, it is rather difficult to regard such level of performance as satisfactory. Without insisting any more, I will refer to paragraph 5 of the Bucharest Statement, which actually confirms such a conclusion: [The participants] “appreciate that the efficiency of BSEC, the economic credibility and effective financing of its future projects have to be considered and reinforced”. Notwithstanding the mild language and the absence of explicit references to other elements affecting the credibility, effectiveness and visibility of the Organisation, the above quoted paragraph is eloquent enough.

In the light of the above-mentioned considerations, the next question is related to the factors or elements that lie at the root of this unsatisfactory situation.

1. The first of them is, in my opinion, a lack of determination or insufficient commitment on the part of the BSEC member states to implement the numberless resolutions, decisions and recommendations adopted by the BSEC Council of Ministers or by other instances of the Organisation. As a result, those dispositions now form a huge and, I suppose, nearly useless archive, since some of the documents, if not completely ignored, are most probably simply forgotten just after their adoption. It is a sad reality that member states frequently have competing interests and even conflicting ones. This explains their different concerns, priorities and positions, leading to ambiguously worded statements, resolutions, decisions and recommendations which are eventually adopted, but unfortunately amount to as many empty words of little consequence.

2. The lack of ambitious but realistic projects in the most significant fields, capable of attracting major investments, particularly in such fields as environmental protection (the Danube, the Dniester and the Black Sea being at the top of the list), sustainable development, energy, the safety of critical infrastructure, fight against organized crime, etc., further illustrates the prevailing situation.



3. The perceived deficiencies in the work of the BSEC institutional structures can sometimes be ascribed to the low level of interest displayed by national authorities in the member countries themselves toward the Organisation as such. This is compounded by the excessive weight of competences assigned to the Committee of Senior Officials which often acts as a blocking factor to fresh ideas; an International Secretariat with an unbelievably small number of professionals, deprived of the essential right to take initiatives and to undertake independent analyses, evaluations and forecasts; an overextended network of subsidiary bodies the practical utility of which remains to be demonstrated; and the limited financial resources at BSEC's disposal.

4. The absence of an operational mechanism to monitor the implementation of intergovernmental conventions, as well as of the resolutions, decisions and recommendations adopted by the BSEC Council of Ministers seriously affects the Organisation's effectiveness, with negative repercussions on its prestige and visibility.

5. The continued reticence of the European Union, specifically of the European Commission, to establish an effective cooperative relationship and an active partnership with the BSEC, the unresponsive stance toward the repeated approaches by successive BSEC Chairmanships-in-Office, and lukewarm reactions to proposals concerning the co-financing of major projects with a significant regional impact represent another unfavorable factor for the actual performance of the Organisation in a wider European context.

6. Another aspect that should not be disregarded because of its potential adverse effects on the BSEC effectiveness and credibility is of a different nature. One can mention in this respect various ambitions and even old-fashioned attempts seeking to acquire dominant positions in the BSEC area and in the Organisation as such. The phenomenon is not a new one. In certain ways, it was experienced even in the early days of the Organisation and further evolved in the course of its existence. The actors involved are usually those that – due to their geo-strategic positions or abundance of valuable resources, large territorial space, great military potential and residual imperial reflexes, which can hardly be underestimated – are tempted to use those perceived advantages with a consistency that may be indicative of long-term designs. Opposing the examination of items that are of obvious interest for the region as a whole, but which may be considered as being detrimental to the preservation of certain dominant positions, is perhaps the most frequently used form of action to that end. Sometimes, the rule of consensus is used excessively and abusively for this purpose. Foreign military presence in the territories of some BSEC member states, without their express consent, continued obstruction of the peaceful settlement of “frozen conflicts”, frequent violation of minority rights, the use of natural resources or artificial limitation of trade to serve definite political goals are just a few of the recent practices which have an adverse effect on the progress of regional cooperation.



III

This part of the paper is intended to present in a more comprehensive manner some practical suggestions that, in my view, deserve to be submitted to the attention of the ongoing academic debate and, possibly, to be further considered by the BSEC decision-making bodies.

1. The main proposed innovation is to develop a **Political Agenda of the BSEC**. The *Economic Agenda for the Future*, which was elaborated in 2001 with the essential contribution of the ICBSS, represents one of the most remarkable achievements of the Organisation. It is a complex and comprehensive document, though perhaps too prolix and rather vague in some of its parts. Still, the Economic Agenda offered a conceptual and programmatic tool, which proved to be particularly instrumental in providing general guidelines for the BSEC activities related to economic cooperation and various other fields. Taking into account this positive experience, it appears suitable, in my opinion, to take a further step forward and prepare an agreed Political Agenda for the BSEC as well. The possible objection that the BSEC is essentially an organisation of economic type is inconsistent as long as it is precisely in its economic dimension that the BSEC performance has proved to be the weakest. Whatever other arguments may be adduced, political commitment has always played a primary role in promoting the achievement of the assigned mission of the Organisation. It is abundantly clear that every intergovernmental organisation that has a predominantly economic profile can function effectively only if the member states prove their political determination to reach the stated economic cooperation objectives. Another possible objection may be that the declarations of the Heads of State and Government and the dispositions of the BSEC Council of Ministers are sufficient expressions of the political will of the member states to act for the implementation of the BSEC goals. This is partially true, but obviously insufficient. The Political Agenda has to be conceived as a visionary document, characterized by coherence and clarity, and including the priority fields for action, the targets to be attained, the measures to be implemented and the deadlines for their achievement. The areas that have been so far neglected or insufficiently explored should be incorporated and treated with due attention in the new suggested instrument. The main dimensions of the Political Agenda are presented in more detail in the paragraphs below.

There is no question of producing another verbose, ambiguous and non-committal document. On the contrary, if it is constructed as a concise, pragmatic and relevant document, the Political Agenda ought to be eminently concrete in its content, spelling out clearly defined guiding principles and precisely articulated objectives for the BSEC bodies to follow in their activities. Elaborated in this manner, the Political Agenda should serve as a basis for working out several strategies and or action plans for specific sectors or thematic areas. Together, the Economic Agenda and the Political Agenda would serve as a road map for the whole spectrum of activities of the Organisation over at least a decade. The Istanbul 15th Anniversary Summit of June 2007 appears to be the most suitable forum for the adoption of the proposed Political Agenda or at least of an appropriate decision to that effect.



2. The second suggested innovation concerns the preparation of several specific **strategies, action plans and cooperation partnerships**. Correlated with the Political Agenda, this new conceptual and methodological approach would signify a substantial change in BSEC's ways of conducting its business. Partial or strictly sectoral measures should be incorporated in a more comprehensive design – as strategies, actions plans, cooperation partnerships – identifying precise targets, practical actions and execution deadlines. The experience of other international governmental organisations, such as the Council of Europe and the European Union as well as other global and regional organisations, persuasively demonstrates the usefulness of such an approach and its relevance for the BSEC.

3. There is an urgent need for a **Strategy for the Strengthening of Security and Stability in the Black Sea Region**. It has been often said, and some people continue to assert, that the BSEC is making its contribution to security and stability in the region primarily through economic cooperation and that this particular aspect is duly underlined in the BSEC Charter. The fact that the development of economic cooperation is a powerful provider of security and stability cannot be denied. But this is certainly only a partial answer to the obvious need to increase the contribution of the Organisation to the consolidation of security and stability in its area of operation.

This aspect of the matter was clarified by the BSEC Decennial Summit Declaration (Istanbul, 25 June 2002), in its paragraph 4, by placing security and stability concerns firmly on the Organisation's agenda and charging the Council of Ministers of Foreign Affairs to develop policy proposals to that effect. The following day, I had the opportunity to present to the ICBSS Board of Directors, meeting also in Istanbul, the proposal that the ICBSS should initiate the elaboration of a working document devoted to this subject, the first step being the setting up of an ad-hoc Study Group. The proposal was unanimously endorsed by the Board. The Seventh Meeting of the Council of Ministers (Tirana, 25 October 2002) agreed to assign that mission to the ICBSS. The ad-hoc Study Group held four brainstorming sessions in Athens, between March 2003 and June 2004, and successfully finalized a *Background Paper on the Ways and Means of Enhancing the BSEC Contribution to Strengthening Security and Stability in the Region*.

Unfortunately, although it may seem incredible, the BSEC Committee of Senior Officials blocked the examination of the working document by the Council of Ministers of Foreign Affairs. Moreover, the same Committee of Senior Officials decided, at its Istanbul meeting (21-22 March 2005), to authorize the ICBSS to circulate the *Background Paper*, “while making it clear that it was adopted at expert level and does not constitute an official BSEC document”.² This is an eloquent illustration of a certain state of affairs within BSEC, when a lower instance, subordinated to the Council of Ministers, acting contrary to the clearly established mandate that had been agreed by the Heads of State and Government of the BSEC member states, simply disregarded their important decision.



In the meantime, it has become abundantly clear that the need to enhance security and stability in the Black Sea region, which was projected into the BSEC agenda in response to evolving realities and the new challenges in the area, cannot be ignored any longer. The new risks and asymmetric dangers in the Black Sea space call for the adoption of a genuine strategy of action in this field, with a focus on the soft security concept. The implementation of such a strategy would have a direct impact on the political and economic security in the Black Sea region and, equally important, on human security. An example worth taking into consideration was provided by the European Union, which adopted two important security documents: *A Secure Europe in a Better World. European Security Strategy* (12 December, 2003) and *A Human Security Doctrine for Europe* (15 September, 2004)³.

The *Background Paper* prepared by ad-hoc Study Group under the coordination of the ICBSS could serve as a good basis for the elaboration of the suggested BSEC Security and Stability Strategy. It is useful to mention in this respect that Chapter V of that document highlights, among other practical measures, two steps that actually anticipate the idea of the proposed Strategy, namely:

- “a) Preparation of a document on enhancing the BSEC contribution to regional security and stability as a guideline for subsequent BSEC activities;
- b) Development of specific Action Plans for the implementation of that document by all the BSEC related and subsidiary bodies, particularly the relevant Working Groups”.

The BSEC Summit to be held next year in Istanbul is an excellent occasion to approve the envisaged Strategy, five years after the Istanbul BSEC Decennial Summit Declaration took that decision.

4. There is also a perceived need for an **Energy Security Strategy in the Black Sea Region**. Energy is one of the greatest concerns in the twenty-first century, at local, national, regional and global levels. The inclusion of a special item on energy security in the agenda of the G8 Summit in Saint Petersburg is a convincing illustration of this fact. For the BSEC member states energy is of vital interest. The region comprises countries that are very rich in resources – particularly oil and natural gas – but there are also enormous needs, especially in the countries lacking such resources. The complementarity is obvious.

The incorporation of this subject of capital importance for the entire region in the BSEC Political Agenda appears to be fully justified. Moreover, it is a matter of pressing necessity. The Chairmanship-in-Office of the Council of Ministers of Foreign Affairs, currently held by the Russian Federation – the holder of the largest energy resources in the region – offers a welcome opportunity to launch a project of extraordinary topicality. Since the item of energy security was included in the G8 Summit agenda by Russia, more precisely by President Putin, it is logical that the same country should take the lead in the elaboration of a BSEC Energy Security Strategy, thus answering the expectations of all the countries in the region.



5. Another pressing need is the elaboration of a **Strategy for the Protection of Critical Infrastructure in the Black Sea Area**. Recent developments, more precisely in the past two years, have brought to the fore an issue of vital importance for both national and international security, namely the perceived vulnerability of critical infrastructure, especially in its cross-boundary dimension. According to the international Risk Governance Council (IRCG), elements of vital infrastructure include: electric power supply and transportation grids; oil, gas and water sourcing, processing, storage and delivery; banking, finance and insurance services; telecommunication and information technology networks; health and emergency services; law enforcement, all of which are heavily dependent upon one another.

Their continuous and reliable operation under any conditions is of tremendous importance for the security of every country. Obviously, they are exposed to threats and hazards such as terrorist attacks or natural disasters. At the same time, they pose considerable risks themselves, mainly to the environment. This being the situation, it is necessary to address the issue of protecting such infrastructure as a matter of priority and without undue delay. Undoubtedly, it is high time for the BSEC member states and for the Organisation itself to take prompt action for the elaboration of a relevant strategy. This is in the national interest of every member state of the BSEC and would be beneficial to the common security interests of the entire Black Sea Region.

6. A distinctive and entirely pertinent element of the proposed BSEC Political Agenda is the **promotion of democracy and democratic processes**. In this respect, it is of utmost importance for the BSEC member states to reaffirm their commitment to uphold the principles of democracy in their respective societies in accordance with the international rules, norms and procedures that they all have accepted, notably as members of the Council of Europe. The concept of democracy may not be explicitly stated as a fundamental goal in the basic BSEC documents, but it is implicit in its members' observance of the UN Charter and several conventions adopted by the Council of Europe. At the same time, we should be guided by the UN General Assembly Resolution 59/2001, adopted on 20 December 2004, entitled *Enhancing the Role of Regional, Sub-regional and Other Organizations and Arrangements in Promoting and Consolidating Democracy*. Bearing in mind the full relevance of that resolution for the matter under consideration, it seems useful to quote two of its paragraphs.

Thus, in paragraph 1, the General Assembly declares that “the essential elements of democracy include respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms, inter alia, freedom of association and peaceful assembly and of expression and opinion, and the right to take part in the conduct of public affairs, directly or through freely chosen representatives, to vote and to be elected at genuine periodic free elections by universal and equal suffrage and by secret ballot guaranteeing the free expression of the will of the people, as well as a pluralistic system of political parties and organisations, respect for the rule of law, the separation of powers, the independence of judiciary, transparency and accountability in public administration, and free, independent and pluralistic media”.



In terms of paragraph 9, both the member states and intergovernmental regional organisations and arrangements are invited “to include or reinforce the provisions of the constitutive acts of the organisations and arrangements that are aimed at promoting democratic values and principles and protecting and consolidating democracy in their respective societies”.

Here it is necessary to stress, however, that, in order to eliminate confusions of any kind or possible misinterpretations, it is appropriate to be inspired by the right approach contained in the United Nations *2005 World Summit Outcome*, adopted by the General Assembly on 16 September 2005. The pertinent provisions in this respect are those inserted in paragraph 135, according to which “We reaffirm that democracy is a universal value based on the freely expressed will of people to determine their own political, economic, social and cultural systems and their full participation in all aspects of their lives. We also reaffirm that, while democracies share common features, there is no single model of democracy, that it does not belong to any country or region, and reaffirm the necessity of due respect for sovereignty and the right of self-determination. We stress that democracy, development and respect for all human rights and fundamental freedoms are interdependent and mutually reinforcing.”

It is certain that, as long as they continue to promote democracy and its core values according to the above conceptual and normative framework, the BSEC member states and the Organisation itself will be on the right track and their results will be successful.

7. Another significant dimension of the BSEC Political Agenda should focus on the implementation of **the principle of solidarity**. Regardless of the angle from which we may look upon things, the need for solidarity is present everywhere in the BSEC region. Natural disasters, including the possible threat of an aviary flue pandemic, poignantly emphasize that necessity. Of course, this is not a matter of mere formal solidarity, usually expressed in political statements on the occasion of unhappy events. From declarative assertion of good feelings, we must move on to active solidarity, expressed in concrete actions and effective measures of mutual assistance. Seen as one of the seven fundamental values proclaimed in the United Nations *Millennium Declaration* and reaffirmed in the *2005 World Summit Outcome*, solidarity should also be considered in a broader sense, as having a bearing on development, peace and security matters as well.

8. The **cultural dimension** and the dialogue among cultures and civilisations in the Black Sea region ought to form a separate chapter of the proposed BSEC Political Agenda. So far, this element of primary importance for successfully building lasting and sustainable relationships among the peoples living in the Black Sea area has been largely ignored, for no valid reason, by the formal BSEC institutions, with the notable exception of the Parliamentary Assembly of the BSEC (PABSEC). The beneficial impact of culture on human development hardly needs to be demonstrated. On the other hand, one cannot overlook the harmful effects of the (occasionally successful) attempts to use the existing cultural differences in order to promote a narrow-minded political agenda. Culture and its symbols are often



abusively invoked to justify misrepresentations, frictions and even intercultural and inter-religious conflicts, with terrible consequences.

The diversity of a priceless heritage constitutes the unique cultural wealth of the Black Sea zone. It should inspire, therefore, projects and cooperative partnerships at local, national, regional and interregional levels to facilitate a most active intercultural and intercivilisational dialogue. This is not only highly desirable, but it is also, politically and logically, the only way to transform culture into a powerful and indispensable vector for peace, understanding, security and stability in the BSEC region. Bearing in mind the importance of continued efforts for the preservation and development of cultural diversity and intercultural dialogue, it is high time to place this issue in a position of prominence on the BSEC working agenda. Such a paradigm change in the priorities and programmes of the Organisation would certainly reflect in a positive way upon its other activities.

9. The more active **involvement of the civil society** and non-governmental organisations in the future BSEC activities is a necessary condition for making the Organisation more responsive to the actual requirements and wishes of the region's citizens. In the world of today, the participation of the civil society and non-governmental organisations in the process of governance, on the basis of mutual understanding and cooperation, has become usual practice. This is a pressing necessity also for the BSEC space. A new vision for the Organisation to meet this requirement is, therefore, unavoidable. Other international organisations offer examples of pertinent experiences and good practice. It will suffice to mention the case of the Council of Europe which granted consultative status, as early as 1952, to international non-governmental organisations (INGOs) and reached, in 2003, a higher qualitative level, by extending to them a participatory status [Resolution (2003) 8 of the Committee of Ministers]. As for the national nongovernmental organisations, in November 2003, the Council of Europe granted them partnership status [Resolution (2003) 9 of the Committee of Ministers]. In appreciation of their contribution as dynamic elements of society, the INGO Conference of the Council of Europe was established as a practical modality to promote the dialogue and cooperation with the regular institutions of the Council of Europe. It is for the BSEC decision-making bodies to find the most suitable ways for establishing a cooperative framework with both the international non-governmental organisations and the national ones with an aim to promoting the Organisation's objectives.

10. The subject of meaningful **BSEC institutional reform** has long been a priority item on its agenda. After nearly 15 years of activity, it is still a matter of arcane argument and convoluted interpretation. Logically, nobody can question the obvious need for an in-depth analysis of the Organisation's past work, covering both its achievements and its limitations and shortcomings. The presentation of objective evidence on the contribution of the BSEC, through its programmes and actions, to the economic and social development of the peoples in the region, and to the progress and modernization of its member states should be a natural first step. In other words, we need an evaluation of the BSEC performance to start with. To illustrate the case, here are some points of reference to be considered: indicators



of the economic development of member countries over a period of fifteen years; poverty reduction; unemployment dynamics; modernization and preparedness to cope with the requirements of the knowledge society; significant projects accomplished or planned in the economic, technological and infrastructure fields; amount of productive investments, especially foreign direct investments; trade liberalization and facilitation of interregional and intraregional trade; comparisons with other geographical areas and regional intergovernmental organisations (see, for example, *Bertelsman Transformation Index 2006*).

A thorough **analysis of the BSEC economic performance** must involve separate but correlated efforts by the relevant Working Groups, the Business Council, the Black Sea Trade and Development Bank, the Project Development Fund, and the BSEC Permanent International Secretariat. Without such an investigation, based on hard facts and figures, the mere repetition of generalities, lacking relevant examples and unpleasant conclusions, would amount to yet another collection of platitudes. To give just one such example, “in 14 years of its dynamic existence, the Organisation of the Black Sea Economic Cooperation (BSEC) has proved its value as a framework of regional cooperation, understanding and mutual confidence as well as a promising mechanism for finding the balance of common interests in the BSEC region” (Bucharest Statement, 2nd paragraph of the preamble).

To supervise the implementation by the member states of the myriad of resolutions, decisions and recommendations adopted by the BSEC Council of Ministers, the measures envisaged in Bucharest Statement cannot lead to the expected results in the absence of a **special monitoring unit**, empowered to act independently, without any interference or censorship, on the basis of clearly established rules and procedures.

The second level of analysis ought to cover the **functioning of the Council of Ministers**, its subordinated organ, the Committee of Senior Officials, as well as the subsidiary bodies, mainly the Working Groups. Even the role of the BSEC Summits should be carefully scrutinized to ascertain if there is genuine determination to act toward revitalizing the Organisation and to transform it into a reliable institution for the twenty-first century.

Finally, the envisaged reform cannot avoid questioning the nature of the **relationship between the Organisation of the BSEC and its Parliamentary Assembly**. It seems advisable to consider their currently overlapping or parallel programmes and activities, the barely disguised rivalry between them and sometimes notable differences on matters of substance. The natural differences between the specific character of governmental and parliamentary action cannot provide a logical justification for the situation existing today. It makes sense, therefore, to initiate a reconsideration of the relationships between the two institutions, leading to a more effective and mutually profitable cooperation. Probably, it would be useful to carefully consider the experiences of other international organisations, specifically those of the Council of Europe and the European Union.



It is indispensable, at this point, to have a correct understanding of the significance of **genuine reform**, as a particularly responsible action. By its very nature, reform must be a creative endeavour, which is just the opposite of a conservative exercise in futility. By definition, reform means “to change a system, law, organisation, etc., so that it operates in a fairer or more effective way” (*Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English*, third edition). Here, the essential word is, evidently, “change”. So, mere partial, paltry or insignificant measures cannot be properly described as genuine reform.

If there is real political will on the part of the BSEC member states to move ahead with a meaningful reform of the Organisation, the best thing to do is to entrust this highly responsible task to an independent panel of experts. That is the way to make sure that the decision makers eventually receive fresh ideas and proposals for creative and practical solutions. Therefore, I would like to suggest the establishment of a **High-Level Panel on the BSEC Reform**, the composition of which should not be restricted only to prominent personalities from member countries, but should also include experienced representatives from various international organisations such as the Council of Europe, the European Commission, OSCE and UN/ECE. The BSEC Permanent International Secretariat should take part, of course, in this work and support it in the accomplishment of its particularly demanding task. Obviously, a valuable and indispensable contribution to the successful completion of the project is expected, for understandable reasons, from the ICBSS.

NOTES

1. Kennedy Graham & Tania Felicio, “Regional Security and Global Governance: A Proposal for a Regional-Global Security Mechanism”, *Egmont Papers* 4, Royal Institute for International Relations (IRRI- KIIB), Brussels, January 2005, p.17.
2. The full text of the Background Paper was published in the *Romanian Journal of International and Regional Studies*, Vol. I, No 1-2/2005, pp. 258-268.
3. See for the texts of both documents *Romanian Journal of International and Regional Studies*, Vol. I, No 1-2/2005, pp. 214-257.
4. The International Risk Governance Council (IRGC) is an independent body involving a public-private partnership, which supports sectoral action in developing and industrially developed countries in close cooperation with the Swiss Federal Institute of Technology, Zurich (see for further information: www.irgc.org).

Note: The present monograph is based on a paper presented to the first Annual Conference of the International Centre for Black Sea Studies (ICBSS) ‘The Black Sea Region: Quo Vadis?’, Rhodes, 7-8 July 2006.



The [International Centre for Black Sea Studies \(ICBSS\)](#) was founded in 1998 as a non-for-profit organisation. It has since fulfilled a dual function: on the one hand, it is an independent research and training institution focusing on the wider Black Sea region. On the other hand, it is a related body of the Organisation of the Black Sea Economic Cooperation (BSEC) and in this capacity serves as its acknowledged think-tank. Thus the ICBSS is a [uniquely positioned expert on the Black Sea area and its regional cooperation dynamics](#). Through all its activities, [the ICBSS aims to foster multilateral cooperation among the BSEC member states as well as with their international partners](#).

The ICBSS is a [proactive member of the BSEC institutional family](#) with a predominantly consultative role. Its representatives participate in the deliberations of the BSEC decision-making, related, and subsidiary bodies. To this end, the ICBSS drafts policy documents (ministerial declarations, action plans, background papers), coordinates the work of ad hoc Groups of Experts in areas such as BSEC-EU Relations and Security and Stability, and actively participates in permanent BSEC Working Groups such as those on Institutional Renewal and Good Governance, and Science and Technology. The ICBSS regularly reports on these activities to the BSEC Committee of Senior Officials.

As an [independent research and training institution](#), the ICBSS exploits synergies with its institutional role and develops complementary activities. This includes the elaboration and publication of independent research papers and studies, the organisation of a variety of events, the management of research projects on a contract basis, as well as networking activities. Most notably the ICBSS' recent programmes and publications include:

- The ICBSS Annual Conference
- The Black Sea Research Network: Creating a multidisciplinary system of research and policy institutes in the Black Sea region
- The ICBSS Outreach Programme: Inviting experts and engaging stakeholders in Greece and abroad.
- Project management: Two EU co-funded projects on Science and Technology Cooperation in the Black Sea region
- The [Xenophon Paper](#) series of policy papers
- The [Black Sea Monitor](#): a quarterly electronic review on the wider Black Sea region
- Contribution to the [Journal of Southeast European and Black Sea Studies](#), published by Taylor & Francis Group (Routledge, London)

The ICBSS is governed by an [international Board of Directors](#), consisting of high-level representatives from the diplomatic and academic communities of all BSEC member states. The Secretary General of the BSEC Permanent International Secretariat and three professionals of international standing from outside the Black Sea region complete the Board.

International Centre for Black Sea Studies (ICBSS)
4 Xenophontos Str., 10557 Athens, Greece
Tel: +30 210 324 2321 Fax: +30 210 324 2244
Email: icbss@icbss.org Website: www.icbss.org
Director General: Dr. Dimitrios Triantaphyllou