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Notes on the Margins
A Longer View: Reflections about
the Future

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Abstract

This *ICBSS Policy Brief* is not a standard article or some witty academic text. Its form or “genre” could be defined as some personal reflections or some inchoate notes on the margins or even a draft for some informal discussion. It is exclusively addressed to those who one way or other possibly may care about the current state or the perspectives of the Black Sea region in general or of the Organization of the Black Sea Economic Cooperation (BSEC) and its Related Bodies specifically. The regional policy-makers, the BSEC bureaucrats, the international experts, but first of all peoples of the wider Black Sea area have to know some details and nuances of the ongoing discourse within that vast space as well as in the BSEC or, for example, specifically at the International Centre for Black Sea Studies (ICBSS) on the sensitive and delicate problems and issues that concern the Black Sea region. For example, due to the formally international status of the ICBSS, the aforementioned discourse is qualitatively unlike the discussions and debates at the formal gatherings of the BSEC. But the author’s goal is not to be too didactic or even somehow compulsive; he merely wishes to reflect in his personal capacity on some ideas that so many times have been vibrantly discussed and discerned in the BSEC community.

Keywords

Black Sea area, efficiency, environmental threats, institutions and actors, International Centre for Black Sea Studies, legitimacy, networking, Organization of the Black Sea Economic Cooperation.

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Notes on the Margins

A Longer View: Reflections about the Future

Tedo Japaridze*

Rationale

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This text constitutes a product of merely personal observations and analytical research and it should in no way be construed as reflecting the views of the states, governments, organizations or institutions with which the author has been associated. Therefore responsibility for any remaining “wrong concept” or any not relevant, “clumsy,” approach, including some technical errors or lacunae, is of that author only.

The idea for a text like this had been percolating in my mind for some time though I was setting up to write it a little bit later. But the situation and the circumstances have changed and I have to leave my position at the ICBSS slightly earlier than I planned. Though I am grateful for that “motivating push” as such ideas and intentions never become reality.

This is not a standard article or some witty academic or stylistically well-formatted eloquent text. Nor is it a traditional *ICBSS Policy Brief* or even a routine one-page Food-for-Thought “Thinking Ahead” paper that you were so accustomed to getting routinely from me on the eve of each Board of Directors (BoD) Meeting since 2007. Its form or “genre” could be defined as some inchoate notes on the margins and it is exclusively addressed to those who one way or other possibly may care about the current state or the perspectives of the Black Sea region in general or of the BSEC and its Related Bodies specifically. These people have to know some details and nuances of the ongoing discourse, for example, within the ICBSS on the problems and issues that concern the Black Sea region, which due to the independent status of the Centre is qualitatively unlike the discussions at the formal BSEC gatherings.

Yet my humble goal, as expected, is not to be too didactic or even somehow compulsive; I merely wish to reflect, again, in my personal capacity, on some ideas that so many times we all have vibrantly discussed and discerned! But I will try to share these highly hypothetical considerations, observations, and conclusions with a reader in a deliberately polemical (I would say, intentionally polemical) way and thus making them open to the harshest criticisms and animated debates. Naturally, while writing this text I kept in mind that in general and specifically in the Black Sea region, we still live in a world of echoes, mirrors, and mirages and challenge to place the reality of our surroundings

into that virtual context and thus brunt our daily activities and the way of thinking.

As some may remember, I was introduced to the notion of the “BSEC” on the whole in 1992 when it was incepted as a regional organisation. It so happened that I was fully engaged with its practical implementation in different capacities: as a Georgian diplomat, as Secretary General of the Permanent International Secretariat of the BSEC (BSEC PERMIS) and now, as Alternate Director General of the ICBSS.

Throughout those tumultuous years and developments, I have been privy to and witness of many fascinating, diverse and dynamic (though sometimes extremely rough and uneven) trends and processes budding and taking shape in the Black Sea region in general and specifically within the BSEC and its Related Bodies. Some of these developments, on which I have widely written in a mostly polemical manner, had origins and effects far beyond the region or its institutions and their aftershock still has been resonating and vibrating within the Black Sea area and its immediate or distant neighbourhood.

Hence, as in 2006, upon leaving the post of the BSEC PERMIS Secretary General, today I again decided to note down some “polemical reflections” on the current state of affairs and the future of the Black Sea region and the BSEC as well as to recall mainly on the developments starting from 2007 when I joined the ICBSS, but doing so strictly, in my personal capacity.

While working on this rather trivial text (many issues and problems raised here have been munched by us in different formats and gathering!) with its somewhat eccentric contextual set-up of unconnected sketches (plus two concrete case-studies) on certain Black Sea/BSEC issues, I may have inadvertently “plagiarised” from some of my previous writings and publications or even the writings of others—I have been brewing in that Black Sea strategic context and intellectual discourse and exchange for so long! So I may incidentally raise the same old questions which you have already heard so many times all over again. Nevertheless, in this regard I would tag on Einstein’s famous maxim that one should always make an effort to find some fresh responses to old predicaments as far as some aged unanswered query may lead to a quantity of brand new ideas leading towards new beginnings or unexplored opportunities.

However, I have one more—maybe too special and emotional—reason to write this lengthy paper and I admitted that in the first paragraph. I have just entered the last month of my tenure at the ICBSS and, as a consequence, I will end my somewhat pretty extended rendezvous with

the entire BSEC system—nineteen years of my professional life by and large! But evidently, I am not going to change my personal “topography:” I was born in the Black Sea area, and I hope to stay forever next to this vast, enthralling and pulsating geographic criss-cross which still has to be fixed accordingly first in our own mindsets. We still are indecisive what we are or how to fix the definition of that vast wider Black Sea area: as some “special geography” or just a “mere geographic expression,” if we scrounge those classifications from the writings of Mackinder and Metternich or to fit it to some other conceptual/geographic notions, I will talk bellow. Nevertheless, I intend to hang about in the area at least in the capacity of just a loyal regional citizen who wishes for the region to prosper, be secure, and gain an appropriate place in the contemporary, cross-dimensional world politics and dynamic global affairs construct.

Petites allusions of an idealist

At the outset, I think that it would be more than appropriate to put forward a couple of broader, somewhat philosophical or maybe even idealistic questions about the Black Sea region and the BSEC system on the whole. We usually forget or even ignore to do so during our routine and frequently mundane daily activities.

Firstly, how might a future historian, expert or even potential BSEC bureaucrat look back on the entire wider Black Sea region, this vast area where history, culture, and unique environment come together in a thrilling way? How will they assess the pace and the quality of regional cooperation in the Black Sea area as well as the ongoing political discourse and particularly on the core issues of regionalism, economic cooperation, development in general, problems of security and stability or the activities of the BSEC and its Related Bodies in this regard? Which actors and forces were pushing things in one direction or the other? What will tomorrow’s historians see as the defining strategic, political, and economic trends of the early 21st century in the wider Black Sea area and concretely in the BSEC and its Related Bodies? How (if at all) will these experts and policy-makers measure, for example, the performance of the ICBSS, a BSEC intellectual hand, which, inter alia, is supposed to forecast those upcoming trends and processes, even predict them and advise the BSEC stakeholders as to what to do in their regard? Will these future analysts say that we all have resolutely and competently identified different scenarios of the regional and global developments? I have certain doubts in this connection

and I think that these are some adequate and relevant questions for all of us and concretely the ICBSS to elaborate and muse over.

So why do I pose this type of questions? It would be appropriate to recall within that context one reference of Ernst Renan, a prominent French philosopher, that the regions, like nations, are not only imagined communities but daily referenda. From my own experience, I would add that the Black Sea region encompasses both notions and this “duality” impacts strongly on the quality of regional mindsets, the existing perceptions and misperceptions, our daily decisions—including on the elusive regional and non-regional dilemmas, so called, as detected by Tom de Waal, “insecurity balances.” Do we have some relevant answers on the issues and balance of different equilibriums encompassing the matters of stability, security, economic cooperation, and many other sensitive problems and topics?

Shall we agree that economic prosperity should become one of the driving forces to tackle these unresolved and still protracted regional problems? But do we agree that economic development will never take place if the security issues are not resolved? And shall we concur that good politics make good economics, and vice versa, while political stalemate invites economic stagnation? By the way, if we agree on that, good, innovative thinking and practical as well as relevant ideas will invite a good and “new” amount of regional investment money which is so important for all-inclusive regional cooperation and development.

I have one idea I would like to share with you in this regard. As I said many times, we need to be innovative and capitalise effectively the BSEC’s unused regional capacity or potential or even geopolitical leverage through our “soft power” instruments, at least when it comes to people-to-people diplomacy. For a while Ilia Roubanis, a thoughtful Greek expert and I were musing over the issue of remittance money—that is enormous mass of cash that has been circulating within the Black Sea region and far beyond it since the dissolution of the Soviet Union and re-emergence of that post-Soviet space. How can they be used as some regional investment opportunity? For instance, why not the BSEC—or the ICBSS to begin with some good concept paper—to analyze a similar to the Mexican program of “3-for-1” which produced matching funds for remittance-generated investment. Why not to check whether some BSEC member states will be able to exert “soft power” on a civil society level and thus create a lobbying leverage that would run under and over governments in the region—friendly or unfriendly—generating power that would be attractive for everybody and tune everybody for some specific but still cooperative efforts in the Black Sea region or within the BSEC—an unusual stance of

development for the BSEC space, I would say! One may say that it is too much sensitive and specific but, well, if we consider that the “remittance money” constitutes the bulk of FDI for Georgia, 44% of the GDP for Moldavia, 5% of the GDP in Romania/Bulgaria, we may conclude that at least the ICBSS has to reflect on that very interesting and explicit regional development, and channel the discourse on those sensitive issues accordingly and relevantly.

My second general point flows from the first and is connected to the sense of being relevant and realistic. Paradoxically, the discussions on being “relevant and realistic” in this part of the world and specifically within the BSEC frequently guide us to the conclusion that to achieve this quality of discourse on even purely pragmatic goals of development and growth in the Black Sea area, and to fine-tune them with the pace and dynamics of the world politics (and do that in a “globalised” manner), we now and then should urge ourselves to think the unthinkable and tackle the intractable in our daily deliberations. And, ironically, we should do that if we want to progress towards a relevant and adequate way in our BSEC activities. We should be innovative instead of trying to approach all these lingering, delicate, and sensitive Black Sea issues and problems only in a marginal, step by step way and thus to be doomed entangled with different bureaucratic and casuistic trimmings which we are so much proverbial to co-exist with or even feel comfortable with in our BSEC gatherings or activities.

Why do I say that?

These days (and that has become sort of axiomatic) the quality and quantity of bankable projects, realistic investment policies, and business environment in the Black Sea region matter more than “sophisticated,” endless, and frequently fruitless discussions on the dilemmas, for example, of “hard” and “soft” security issues versus the problems and the perspectives of regional economic cooperation. To make it short and blunt, while we all somewhat agree that in the Black Sea area nowadays the quality of banks matter more than the quality of the best tanks, we still try to prove ourselves and to others that security and economic cooperation issues are two irreconcilable topics. We just overlook or simply ignore the vital fact that these notions are two complimentary sides of the same coin by name of “stability.” Shall we break through that vicious circle and agree to start tackling our regional sensitive issues and dilemmas, the so called regional “difficult matters”? Should we agree among ourselves that those

BSEC “difficult matters” are in practice just a combination of different, complex, and intertwined substance we encounter daily in the BSEC?

So I feel that it is high time to put aside any regional “theology” that attempts to disconnect or split the security and economic development concepts. We have to stop looking at them in a very narrow either “state/government” or bureaucratic way. It is just unrealistic and irrelevant for in today’s world, as I admitted above, the notions of “security,” “cooperation,” “development” have economic, political, cultural, security, environmental, social and societal dimensions and neither of them can be developed or discussed separately or in some vacuum! And these so called “hard” and “soft” versions are interconnected and intertwined with each other and our task is to merge them into a smart and contemporary broader and comprehensive security paradigm and keep in mind that “economic cooperation” the most essential part of that overwhelming concept! I have voiced this view and discussed it with my colleagues time and again.

Why do I insist on this matter?

We live in an interdependent, interconnected, intertwined, and fully globalised world. Yet in our region these linkages interact with inequality, instability, and climate change to create a situation which is politically and economically unsustainable. Some regional analysts even argued recently that the end of the Cold War brought along the return of traditional patterns of untidiness, uncertainty and complexity in international relations and specifically in the Black Sea region. Therefore, when deliberating how to address those dire issues, we have to combine a focus on our own problems with an awareness of the ways in which they reflect these broader global developments.

That is by no means an easy task. Why? The nature and the context of some problems in general, and especially in areas like the Black Sea region, as admitted above, are so multifaceted and wide-ranging, versatile and interconnected/intertwined with each other. Alas, we often focus on our bureaucratic nuisances, blurring our strategic lenses and thus missing the ongoing grand developments or the upcoming perspectives beyond them, and who knows, maybe even some still hidden options to achieve a grand compromise and to reach the strategic settlement mainly within the post-Soviet Black Sea space but in our mindsets as well and first of all!

We time and again disregard that we can only address these so called “small regional issues” (which really are those “difficult matters,” I’ll note a

bit bellow) and the ways and means to tackle them accordingly and relevantly, if we think about the bigger strategic picture and context. This can happen only if we find an appropriate niche for the regional problems in that broader strategic and diverse—and sometimes more than vibrant—panorama or kaleidoscope which the Black Sea region is supposed to fit into.

The ICBSS has some unused potential and the capacity to navigate the BSEC and us, regional actors, accordingly and first of in a smart, innovative way through that intellectually and politically land-mined Black Sea debris.

The new regional geometry of power in the Black Sea and the BSEC: the eye of the next political storm or the shining sea of stability?

I know that plea for the regional cooperation in the wider Black Sea area still has a whiff of alchemy upon it—great in theory but still extremely difficult in practice. Some too much sarcastic experts still characterise this often turbulent area as comatose, a place of "stable absurdity" or as "a black hole" into which everything—and, according to them, mostly positive matter—immediately disappears and nothing constructive comes out. Such approaches (I would humbly agree with some of them) still relegate the Black Sea region and the BSEC in the minds of those [and mostly Euro-Atlantic, European Union (EU) policy-makers and experts] to some obscure grey zone of near permanent instability or of a security vacuum area, a sort of, as some say, Eastern Balkans, where wars and disputes continue to occur without any possibility for real stability.

It is difficult to predict future perspectives in general and specifically of the Black Sea region—one of the most diverse and, I would say, even perplexed and overly mystified areas in the world. Even impartial and trivial discussions on a range of indisputable facts of the regional history or geography usually turn into a storm of vibrant debates that shape a variety of different interpretations and confusing, more than mystified and irrational narratives.

For that reason, to tackle the future of the Black Sea region one must take into account the underlying patterns of regional history, the informal fabrics of the regional politics, the regional political legacy and regional loyalties, alongside with the regional capacities, industries, agriculture, resources, and cultural heritage. Besides that, we need to try first to identify

and then to fix all those looming post-modern threats and challenges the region has been plagued by recently. Though, on the other hand, how can we do that if in our daily activities we have to grapple with them by using only the variety of old-fashioned, modern or even pre-modern political and economic instruments that we currently possess in our hands? Hence, how can one manage those dire arrangements with the myriad of impending and converging strategic vectors that are shooting at us from different parts of the globalised world and impacting directly on the quality of lives of the region's peoples? Is it possible to do that disregarding entirely that "thinking the unthinkable" way, I admitted above?

Why, again, do I pose that question?

As some experts admit,¹ these days the Black Sea region once again (!) finds itself between zones of geopolitics and competing geopolitical dogmas, between different and contradicting developmental models, and that is why the coherence of the region would require a coalescence of internal and external factors that have never coalesced in practice. It is quite obvious (and we all more or less agree on that) that the wider Black Sea area is an integral part of the existing systems of security and cooperation, but at the same time it is a vital link, a "strategic corridor," to outlying regions that have huge potential for the strategic realignment.

The entire Black Sea region vividly demonstrates in all its complexities the problems we are simultaneously confronted with and confounded by in so many troubled areas of today's world. What is more, as admitted by General Bruce Lawlor, an American expert from Virginia Technical University, we see that this region is at the same time at the front of many of the difficulties that we face, and it is also a principal artery through which so many of the problems with which we are concerned today are transmitted to the wider world. It is an area where different "public goods" and "public bads," diverse and mostly contradicting elements of "hard" and "soft" security, including their functional varieties—energy, environment as well as some other non-traditional and asymmetric post-modern or so called "non-systemic" web of threats and challenges—intersect, merge or sometimes even clash with one another.

But there is more we need to pay attention to and take care of within a purely economic/commercial dimension. For instance, we need to make energy security (a basic and essential segment of economic cooperation in

¹ For example, James Sherr, Director of the Russia and Eurasia Programme at the Chatham House.

the Black Sea region) not only an integral part of regional economic security, but construe a setting in which (a) each and every Black Sea state has adequate, uninterrupted supplies of cleaner, reliable, and sustainable energy; (b) the wider Black Sea area supplier countries have predictable markets and relatively stable prices; and (c) the Black Sea regional (and international) energy-related decisions (pipelines, down- and up-stream investments, market access, pricing, etc.) are driven primarily by commercial, not political considerations.

The BSEC is uniquely positioned to be in the middle of those fascinating energy developments in the wider Black Sea/Caspian area because of that first non-OPEC oil and gas production and transportation within our area through extraction, consumption and transit. These processes are already impacting and altering the strategic landscape in and around the entire Black Sea region and even beyond it and that oil and gas output may reach perhaps even those subsidiary pipelines that are located in the Eastern Mediterranean. And who knows, whenever it happens, that will connect these two regions with a veritable umbilical cord, impacting the strategic dynamics on the ground there, especially in those BSEC countries that are so tormented with some internal and external problems.

We should be more sensitive towards the regional resource security as a vital part of the Black Sea economic security and cooperation. Moreover, the BSEC should arrange a setting in which all states in the Black Sea area, as well as any related countries beyond it, will have adequate and uninterrupted provisions of water and food so as to avoid crises of supply for one or more states capable of producing intra- or inter-state political conflict.

We should remember that the Black Sea region is a distinctive space where, for example, some energy and transport corridors are used no less effectively for all kinds of illicit trafficking, especially nuclear and radioactive materials or humans. Ironically, these “bad guys” are cooperating much better and in a much more efficient manner through their skilfully formatted networks than, for example, the BSEC Related Bodies interact with each other.

I fully understand that I have raised some sensitive and rash questions above. They are not simple to answer; moreover, they are politically too delicate to deal with. Why? As I admitted above, historical/collective memory in this vast region is varied, confused, and mystified, and therefore often contradictory and neurotic. I have argued many times that the wider Black Sea area is not even a “region,” in the sense that Scandinavia is perceived clearly as a “region.” Nor, as some analysts try to

describe the wider Black Sea area, is it simply a “periphery,” a “black hole” or “the Bermuda Triangle,” through which a traveller might pass or, worse, even disappear on the way to somewhere else. I would agree with the few who define this area as a “strategic corridor” as well as a “strategic space,” sharing perhaps in terms of external perception many of the same characteristics as “Central Asia.”

So how does that vast space discern in our own mindsets and the mindsets of others? What is the future of that immense and multi-functional area, its political, economic, security, and strategic perspectives and its unique gravitas in general? Is the wider Black Sea area, as some still tend to say, a classic case of an area that one might characterise less than, for example, Scandinavia is, as a distinct locale with its own strategic identity? Or is it a junction point where the converging vectors of strategic dynamics, originating far outside the region come together and could significantly alter the way the wider Black Sea countries view future challenges and opportunities? Interesting questions for the ICBSS to muse over and to provide some relevant answers to!

We know that as a region it has a surfeit of security challenges and risks, stemming from unresolved—or as we now say—simmering or protracted conflicts, energy supply and energy security in general, plus to that the above-mentioned illicit trafficking of all kinds, mass migration, climatic change and environmental problems, and of course the military activities in neighbouring Afghanistan, Iraq and most recently in some areas of Northern Africa and the Greater Middle East. These challenges are exacerbated by multiple and porous borders, difficult terrain, and well-established smuggling channels and terrorist activities within the wider Black Sea space and areas far beyond it—Central Asia and the Greater Middle East.

Why do I focus on those specific issues?

Because in the BSEC, as I noted above, we sometimes like to ignore the simplest, most sound and relevant solutions, and instead repeatedly choose those options to cure some regional “disease” that are worse than the malady itself. For example, as repeatedly acknowledged, we all know that the wider Black Sea area has been plagued with different kind of conflicts, disputes and violence, but we never discuss them or tackle their resolution through the patterns of regional economic cooperation or development. Somehow we ignore or neglect that these unresolved or protracted conflicts and disputes make the existing dire economic conditions in the

region worse, hence making poor countries of the Black Sea region even poorer.

We should keep in mind that violence is not one cause of poverty among many; it is becoming the primary cause, especially in the wider Black Sea area. As noted by the Economist a while ago, countries that are prey to violence and conflicts are often trapped in both violence and poverty. We witnessed that in the Black Sea region! And this has profound implications both for poor countries trying to pull themselves out of underdevelopment, and for rich ones trying to help. It hampers strongly the perspectives of regional cooperation and consequently the BSEC's own efficiency and effectiveness. Development in our part of the world is mainly held back by not only what is known as a "poverty trap" but also by a "violence trap." Peaceful countries are managing to escape poverty that is becoming concentrated in countries riven by civil wars, ethnic conflicts (even and especially the low-intensity ones), organised crime, and a variety of disputes. Violence and bad governance prevent them from escaping that trap, whereas growth and economic development would presumably reduce the incentive to fight, though it would not necessarily lead to better governance and even may enrich just few in power.

Are we focused in the BSEC resolutely on those sensitive issues and problems? Do we look, for example, at the conflict-resolution agenda within the Black Sea area through that prism of regional cooperation and development as an additional instrument for their resolution? The ICBSS, an independent regional think tank, could have been a right place to do that?

Why, again and again, do I say that?

Some experts have recently exposed a couple of polemical hypothesis in this regard. One group of them admit that the August war in 2008 brought some remnants of old-fashioned "Realpolitik" to the Black Sea region and the situation was further complicated by the emergence of the global financial and economic crisis that came on the heels of conflict. Some analysts argue that the majority of the BSEC countries embarked on efforts to rebuild the state. These efforts, according to Professor S. Neil MacFarlane from the University of Oxford, involved the restoration of state structures, policies directed towards economic recovery, and deliberate efforts to enhance national cohesion. The latter had important external dimensions. For some, that was about the restoration of regional influence as part and parcel of the resuscitation of the state, for others an instrument of reunification of the country and accession to European

security (NATO) and economic (the EU) frameworks as essential elements of the state-building agenda. These projects clearly contradicted each other and generated a strong propensity for conflicts and disputes between the regional states. Did that impact on the quality of developments within the BSEC? Unfortunately it did and we witness that daily through the Organization's daily activities.

This propensity was further strengthened by a highly asymmetrical regional distribution of power, and by the efforts of the BSEC weaker state to correct this imbalance through external alliances. That itself generated a risk of political and economic deterioration in some countries, while generating substantial tensions in relations between Russia, other European states, and the United States. It also challenged underlying European understandings of the nature of regional security in the European space. On the other hand, some analysts acknowledge that even the current post-2008 interpretation of "Realpolitik" and especially the way it recently sort of re-emerged in the Black Sea area is in many ways conventional and rather negative but, on the other hand, not traditionally inflexible. As those experts and policy-makers say, unlike the Cold War where paradigms of foreign policy were cohesive, today we can speak of different and competing foreign policy circles. When it comes, for example, to energy, then what is at stake is the main cash-cow, that is, revenue that some countries in the Black Sea count upon in order to diversify their economic base. However, on other directions of economic cooperation and development in general, it is clear that so called "smart power"/"soft power" variations are on the table. The problem here is whether those in the BSEC who possess that capacity use it to make the BSEC more relevant and issue-oriented!

Clearly, each government in the Black Sea area (or even within the BSEC) as elsewhere must make a careful selection of foes and, in few words, choose its battles. We can not ask, for example, Russian or Turkish (or any country in the region) governments not to intervene actively in the economy or not to have state-friendly oligarchs. Still, this does not mean that these countries would not opt for the cultivation of economic ties that would broaden their own productive base. We should remember that partisan politics in the Black Sea region are less than regimented, and that no one can take his/her own power for granted. In any case, for the moment I think the future in the foreign and economic policy is the construction of feasible cross-sectoral networks that produce tangible and viable benefits. If such networks are cohesive and intergovernmental enough, enriched with the most active engagement of the private sector, the Diasporas, civil society/non-governmental organisations, and the union

movements, and generate benefits for every party involved, then we can slowly create a viable regional market. That is, a single Black Sea market rather than volatile sectoral markets that are continuously held hostage to geopolitical developments.

Perhaps in the long-run we can not escape EU-type multilateral bonding, though even that, as we know, is not some panacea from the dire internal or external problems the EU happens to be currently engulfed with. But the Black Sea community and especially policy-makers still prefer to develop and operate so called two-pronged “barbell strategy” when the majority of regional countries tend to deal with each other than through the BSEC and keep the balance of their bilateral relations instead of pursuing the goals that would be beneficial for the entire Black Sea region. As Mark Medish has correctly noted, some “Manichaeian forms of regional pride and mercantilism” still overwhelms our daily activities. I would humbly add that frequently these political/mental or bureaucratic “Manichaeian bacilli” of old-fashioned rigidity and dogmas are still verifiable in the wider Black Sea area and specifically within the BSEC. These infect the prospects for positive and productive discourse among the BSEC member states.

BSEC “difficult matters”

The recent turbulent events within the wider Black Sea area and especially the 2008 war area have created more than sensitive strategic momentum: on the one hand, there’s one dismembered, defeated BSEC member state and on the other hand, there are two newly re-emerged entities (Abkhazia and South Ossetia) which have been recognised by, again, only one BSEC member. That leaves an unrecognised space within the BSEC area or some “grey zone”/security vacuum locale that would hamper the perspectives of economic cooperation in the region. I understand that according to the BSEC practice and its Charter, the Organisation is absolved to discuss any regional conflicts or regional security issues in general. But these new thorny developments after 2008 have created some “Realpolitik,” confuse, rather specific, thorny situation on the ground. More than that concrete development indicated that bold steps are needed in the BSEC to address in general concrete national security concerns and economic discontent in complex though we know that some regional governments have treated national and economic security as distinct and separate.

I intend to muse a bit on these issues only within that BSEC developmental/economic cooperation context or how that milieu

negatively impacts the quality of that cooperation and its perspectives, and suggest to the ICBSS to elaborate more in this regard and offer to the BSEC member states some reasonable and realistic options.

So, as I said many times above, the two concepts of economic cooperation and security and stability are inextricably linked in most developed states and the majority of experts concur with that economic security and the sustainable economic development lie at the basis for a state's capacity to function and defend itself. But it is nowhere pertinent than in some fledgling regional democracies, which are under extreme pressure both externally and internally. A number of political/economic/management missteps at home have already heightened or may impact societal dissent that is often articulated in economic terms.

Understandings of linkages between free market economics, entrepreneurial activity, sustainable employment, and, hence, internal and external stability, according to Professor Mamuka Tsereteli from the American University in Washington, D.C., is very thin in some countries of the wider Black Sea society or, for that matter, within their national governments.

In reality, according to Professor Tsereteli, the key problems of these economic models are structural, managerial, and social/cultural. The decision-making process in the majority of the BSEC member states is over-personalised and under-institutionalised, and there is lack of interest in strengthening important institutions as well as implementing an effective interagency process where no interagency process of note exists at all. Some regional governments have sought to strengthen this in the national security field, but in other sectors, especially the economy, better coordination is lacking. So we witness a typical clash between the two concepts: a "strong State-Building first and then Democracy" versus a "Democratic/Strong State-Building" on a parallel track. Failing to create a less personalised, deeply institutionalised economic vision complete with transparent and modern processes will have important implications for national security planning. That curbs the developments within the BSEC and impedes its productivity in general.

So implementing correct policies could transform into tangible economic results which would be important for internal stability, but also for the regional sustainable cooperation, development, and stability. A free and innovative business environment will attract innovative businesses and creative individuals from all over the world. For those regional countries, economic security and national security should be seen as part of one process rather than two parallel processes that may or may not converge.

To make it simple and as I admitted above: investments flow into the stable space and brings along stability and improvement of the business environment and of the economic cooperation in general.

If we project those a bit too much academic considerations or patterns on the existing regional practice of economic cooperation and look at it through that “Realpolitik confuse” of the 2008 war of which I talked a bit above, naturally, we need to find out ways how to deal with it. Follow the EU path through the formula “engagement but not recognition” or Turkey’s example which tries to intensify it’s economic/trade relations with those new entities within the BSEC space? Or shall we adamantly stick with that BSEC approach, hide behind the BSEC Charter and just ignore the existence of some “black holes” within the BSEC area and keep doing business as usual? Naturally, we can and we have been doing that by disregarding those dire problems, but have those conflicts and disputes disappeared or have been resolved at least somehow? Just the opposite: they have become more gangrenous and some of them have already exploded or may detonate in the future and severely damage the exact idea of the BSEC and of the economic cooperation and development in general. Isn't that a topic for the ICBSS to muse over and offer some options at least for some informal deliberations?

Some old reflections on the new realities around the BSEC

I have written and talked much about the BSEC in the recent years and my distinguished colleagues from the BSEC Committee of Senior Officials (CSO) and the ICBSS’ BoD did that in a more effective and eloquent way. Especially, I should acknowledge very solid and substantial academic research on this sensitive and delicate topic published by Ambassador Sergiu Celac and Dr. Panagiota Manoli.

So how can we make the BSEC relevant and issue-oriented? How can we fix and fit the BSEC and its capacity to that new regional and global geometry of power distribution and its practical relocation in a more efficient way?

We have agreed that we need to be innovative and making at least one step ahead. We also need to keep in mind that the Black Sea region is an area with strategic perspectives that may become a place of strategic consequences if the problems previously analysed will not be dealt accordingly and in a realistic manner. At least, the BSEC needs to have a new Economic Agenda to deal with the issues of the post-modern world and make that agenda attractive to the international community and other

global institutions and organisations but first of all to the regional stakeholders and specifically to the BSEC member states. The ICBSS has been working on that concept paper recently; yet how will the BSEC—before becoming global”—fit into that new and more than fragile equation within the Black Sea area? I pose this question as I strongly believe that the BSEC member states should become a “collective author” of that concept paper, and the ICBSS only can modestly compliment, through its intellectual capacity and potential, to that complex and comprehensive process!

What we are forgetting in our daily proceedings and deliberations, the concept of BSEC, as envisioned by its Founding Fathers in 1992, was not only a tool or a mechanism for a regional international organisation with its relevant structure and bureaucracy (including the Related Bodies), but as some device for the member states to work together and relatively in unison on a regional level, innovate and recalibrate, adjust and adapt the regional landscape to the realities budding within and round the Black Sea and the Organisation itself in the post-Soviet period. So we now and then forget that the BSEC besides being a solid institutional structure is not an end-product but an ongoing process on the matters of regional cooperation, its strategic perspectives. The leading role in that process naturally belongs to the BSEC member states—to their intellectual capacity and political will to contribute competently and resolutely to the BSEC process, to forecast on the future perspectives and even predict or re-discover them, fine-tune those kind of “unthinkable ideas” and energise the BSEC’s unused potential to the existing realities on the ground, and even to think a step forward.

That was the essence of the BSEC from the very beginning: to incept in the Black Sea neighbourhood, especially after the collapse of the Soviet Union, a full-fledged international organisation which was supposed to deal specifically with the issues of comprehensive regional economic cooperation and development.

As I remember, we all spent many tumultuous hours in 1992 to find some relevant *modus operandi* for several strategic dilemmas (which, by the way, are still pertinent up to now!): (a) how to define a region as large and as complex as the territory that surrounds the wider Black Sea area, and especially the space that emerged after the demolition of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR); and (b) how to characterise the ongoing and budding developments shaping so dynamically the Black Sea region, which was previously defined by some experts as dormant and moribund.

On the one hand, the BSEC was supposed to develop and trigger the huge and inadequately or totally unused and insufficiently managed economic potential and resources of the Black Sea area, and endeavour its gradual integration into the system of various existing global institutions and politico-economic arrangements. The second goal of the BSEC and, no less noble, was to lend a hand to the newly independent states of the post-Soviet space in order to move them from the task of transitioning, where they had been just couple of years earlier, to the more complex task of transformation, which was about an uphill, tumultuous, and contradictory, as noted above, capacity-building process, focused on what they would become in the future.

The BSEC system, and first of all the BSEC process, has been a truly unique intellectual collective experiment: to make the regional stakeholders understand that security and prosperity, as well as sovereignty, independence, and economic cooperation were indivisible. It was not an easy task; to grasp that for future perspectives of the Black Sea region, as I admitted above, the quantity and quality of banks and hotels mattered much more than the quantity and quality of even the very best tanks. And, ironically, even these days, we all still need yet to acknowledge accordingly that democracy and the market economy, including economic cooperation and development and growth in general, are desirable final stages of an unending processes of enduring revision, recalibration, readjustment, and transformation.

So the BSEC is moving forward. Maybe a bit too slowly but still I have witnessed that progress. However, that does not mean that problems and difficulties are diminishing. On the contrary: the BSEC progress presents the member states with further challenges that will multiply and become more complex. The BSEC should be reformed and renovated and we all agree to do that, but somebody needs to take a lead in this connection. Which of the BSEC member states will take upon itself the burden of orchestrating the BSEC's pending "re-invention"? Turkey, as it did in an innovative way in 1992? Or Russia by drawing on its unique intellectual and natural potential, and which is supposed, coincidentally, to hold the BSEC Chairmanship on the eve of the Organisation's twentieth anniversary? Or will it be the Hellenic Republic which has already taken most resolute and qualitative steps to move the BSEC closer to the EU? Only the BSEC itself, its officials and member state delegates can enhance that vision and work hard on the renewal process. It needs confidence to build on the existing structures and resources of the region, to put forward views, assemble forums, initiate projects, and create relationships that will transform qualitatively the existing structures, relations and the decision-

making process within the BSEC itself. The BSEC urgently needs to identify its new agenda and do that in a very competent and comprehensive way.

As I noted above, the ICBSS, instructed by the BSEC Council of Ministers of Foreign Affairs (CMFA) and CSO, has been working on a new draft of the BSEC Economic Agenda under the title “New Challenges for a New B.S.E.C.” No doubts that the BSEC needs to prioritise its agenda and identify in a more practical and realistic manner those areas of activity which may bring fruitful results and will be focused on so-called bankable projects for the twenty first century. It seems that currently the BSEC’s portfolio is too over-burdened. So the scope of its activities should be trimmed accordingly and be focused on the following key areas: trade and investment, energy, transport, environment, good governance, and the rule of law.

Naturally, to accomplish these goals we first need to find the way forward for the BSEC; we need to develop a comprehensive system of legally binding agreements, complete with implementation and monitoring mechanisms, and to mark the coming of age of the BSEC as an effective and functional regional organisation. We should, as advised by some, do our best to enhance the role and responsibility of the BSEC CMFA in setting policy guidelines and assessing the performance of the BSEC subsidiary organs, executive mechanisms, and Related Bodies. But I would like to pose one more polemical question: as far as the BSEC CMFA has already its role to shape any BSEC policy, why move the authorities further up rather than down towards those who work daily on the different BSEC topics in hand?

These new balances should be identified by the BSEC New Economic Agenda, together with the perspectives and mechanisms of its practical implementation. But here’s one concrete nuance: again, it is not only for the ICBSS to identify these noble goals and work on that concept paper—it is for the BSEC member states to play the leading and decisive role in this very comprehensive, complex, and strategic endeavour. Is it going that way? I’m posing that question not in purely rhetorical manner, as you may guess!

A loud message for the EU: it is time to be more than just “visible mais absent”!

The BSEC—EU interaction is one of the most prominent and vibrant political games in the wider Black Sea area or as some policy-makers acknowledge, the hottest ticket in town! The ICBSS has been for years the coordinator of the “Ad hoc Group of Experts on BSEC—EU Interaction.” We have accomplished some things during this more than tumultuous discourse. However, to be frank, there are not many concrete and feasible results for the peoples of the region but some good ideas, concepts and projects, but all that still needs first to be agreed among the EU and BSEC member states and then to be realised into practice.

Europe’s neighbourhood policy towards the Black Sea region, in my humble opinion, could be described as “engagement lite:” it offers countries on the EU’s rim the prospect of integration short of full membership—“everything but institutions.” According to some analysts, the “commitment of the European governments is less certain now than it was at the launch, for example, of the Eastern partnership (EaP).” Will that [alongside with the Black Sea Synergy (BSS)] still be an “antechamber” for accession into the EU? More concretely and a bit allegorically, as some European experts admit, the EU currently provides the “background music” (but, as some say, in a bit Wagnerian style: we hear some noise at the beginning but not music yet) to the dance for which the BSEC and the regional actors themselves need to put the pace and rhythm. Even the choreography of that regional quadrille entirely depends on how innovative and resolute the BSEC itself will be as long as the EU, due to its internal and external problems, is a mostly passive partner in that locale hop.

In some of my earlier publications I argued that the EU policy towards the Black Sea and concretely towards the BSEC was initially more than ambivalent and reticent, and I can now add that it still remains that way. Initially, the EU’s first priority after the “Big Bang” enlargement was to focus on deepening the integration with its new members rather than on further integrating non-member applicants. That is why there is still a certain deep-seated wariness within the EU community. I wrote earlier that this wariness stems in part from the internal politics of the EU itself, and in part from the seemingly endless and still ongoing debate on the “wider” versus “deeper” directions.

The Black Sea region for the EU is still a distinct periphery which is psychologically seen as a problem-ridden distraction that can no longer be

ignored completely, but which can be contained or dealt with through individual state based aid and technical assistance. At least this, in my cynical opinion, seems to be the EU's rationale. But even in more "enlightened" circles of Europe, by which I mean those who admit that the EU should have a direct involvement in the politics and policies of the Black Sea region, there is a definite sense that more should be done, if only out of self-interest (always the best political motive, I believe, because it is inherently sustainable). Those people understand clearly the growing energy and transit route importance of the wider Black Sea area for the EU. They can read a map and instinctively know that chronic instability and economic malaise on the EU's borders are a dangerous combination. But this camp does not know what to do and fears failure of throwing good money and resources.

I wrote many times earlier that we need to understand that the West likes "success" and from this very perspective our area does not promise to make EU citizens happy soon. The result is a muddled, middle-of-the road policy course with no particular strategic destination in mind. I also acknowledged in my earlier publications that such an assessment may appear harsh and pessimistic. But in addition I further elaborated that, indeed, perhaps the seeds of a strategy can be discerned in it as well, because ultimately, only events on the ground—developments within the BSEC space itself—that would drive and shape EU policy towards the region.

As noted above, there was some modest progress regarding the prospects of EU—Black Sea area (BSEC) relations. Currently the EU works in the Black Sea region within two initiatives: the BSS and the EaP. We know that the BSS initially constituted an attempt by the EU to create a complementary format to the already existing European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP), the EU—Russia format, and membership negotiations with Turkey. Later, following the war in August 2008, the EU initiated the EaP as a framework for multilateral cooperation.

Despite the fact that the re-emergence of both the BSS and the EaP is a positive development for the entire wider Black Sea area and specifically for the BSEC, as a natural and potential partner of those formats, some regional experts and pundits express their clear scepticism in their regard. As I admitted in my earlier texts, they expound on the parallelism and overlap between the BSS and the EaP, particularly concerning the potential for contribution, impacts, and implications for the BSEC. I would join this group of critics. The never-ending debate over "equal partnership" between the EU and the BSEC deviates from the proper and much needed

discussions about the real issues and problems and blurs the strategic focus of the EU/BSEC decision-makers.

A while ago I wrote that there is a military concept known as “getting within your opponent’s ‘decision cycle.’” That notion is relevant today as well! I am not suggesting that there should be a confrontational state change in those relationships! Just the opposite and I think the above-mentioned concept is relevant here. So a BSEC engagement strategy that is built around serving the self-interests of the EU stands the greatest chance of success. And, ironically, it would also serve the best interests of the BSEC member states.

When oilmen gather at night over a beer, they often talk about the two Golden Rules of the oil industry: the first is that “it is all about the money.” The second rule is “never forget rule number one.” To which I would add a third: “it is all about relationships and delivery, stupid!” So the EU, irrespective of whether it is motivated by a fear of further expansion or of instability on its new borders or of possible energy disruptions, needs new relationships in the Black Sea region. The BSEC can help deliver those relationships and the tangible, practical projects and initiatives they might produce. And just like events, no one can predict where relationships might lead.

The possible weakness of the EU approach to the region is simply that it focuses too tightly on individual countries; in other words, it may not see the forest through the trees. The BSEC can and should provide that perspective (which we are not doing as well—a regional approach). It needs to develop a mindset that looks at those other strategic vectors, whether from the Middle East or Central Asia or elsewhere, and produces an analysis that says: “Right, this is the likely impact on us (individually and collectively), and this is the likely impact or implication for our EU neighbours and our other strategic partners, such as the United States or Japan.” And it needs to present and promote those views in a way that does not isolate or irritate any of those parties.

The ICBSS, as a coordinator of the “Ad hoc Group of Experts on BSEC-EU Interaction,” has to play a leading role in this discourse, use its so called “soft”/“smart” intellectual power within the BSEC system to make that interaction with the EU efficient, practical, and forward-looking. More than that, the ICBSS could convene a workshop, a round-table discussion or even conference on those issues and discuss specific problems and ideas in more informal and academic way. I think that Russia as the upcoming President of the BSEC together with the ICBSS may organise this kind of event. We need to discuss those sensitive and delicate issues urgently with

a clear-cut understanding that our economic interests are inextricably intertwined, irrespective of our political future. We are prisoners of our geography. So let us focus on economic cooperation, where both sides have a clear and long-term strategic interest, especially when we have three EU member states in the BSEC.

That said I would like to share with you one more specific consideration which is directly connected with the perspectives of the BSS and especially the EaP. There are some voices within the BSEC and the EU space who try to interpret the new EU initiatives (and specifically the EaP) as some hostile attempt to “encircle Russia” or even isolate it. It has to be understood that these are not only wishful but even unwise conclusions and perceptions. First of all, it would be impossible to “encircle” Russia, one of the most powerful and capable BSEC member states. It is just politically unwise even to think that way! Any, even hypothetical, “endeavour” to follow this path is simply doomed to fail and the bearer of such a strategy will not be able to collect any merits in respectable circles. More than that, as noted by some experts, the EU's “supranational” approach with collective positions agreed on in advance, does not suit Russia which prefers dealing directly with the EU national leaders or even companies, and due to these habits and practice EU positions are often undermined by individual EU member states pursuing their own interests. Does not that impact vibrantly on the perspectives of the BSEC—EU relations? Does not that remind us some habits and practice within the BSEC where the self-interests of member states (either weak or strong alike!) prevail, as I noted above, over the regional interests and perspectives?

All sides are interested in a positively engaged Russia within the wider Black Sea area and far beyond it. I fully agree with the thoughtful comments of Nadia Alexandrova-Arbatova that a “Partnership for Modernisation,” a joint Russian—EU declaration will create a new model for Russian relations with the EU. But I would humbly add that this model will positively impact also on Russia’s relationship with its Black Sea neighbourhood and specifically on the activities of the BSEC as well. Nevertheless, what is obvious as well is that Russia, as well as some other regional strong players, needs to identify more precisely the substance of its “good neighbourhood policy.” It is indeed possible that Russia or some other regional countries could evolve its own version of that strategy, as Turkey is currently trying to do with its proposal of the Platform for Stability and Cooperation in the region. I understand that due to some certain historic, political or even psychological reasons it will not be easy for some regional actors to share, for example, the Turkish approach of

having “zero problems with neighbours” and practise that at least as some more than formal gesture. I understand that my ideas are just wishful and more than hypothetical! Though maybe it is worth for other regional countries to try to implement as a minimum only some elements of that policy and, again, do that to promote certain self-interests. Naturally, I pose that purely academic question and the ICBSS may reflect on it and many other of that kind.

To summarise, the BSEC (in this case mainly through the ICBSS) needs to use its regional outlook more efficiently. In order to do that productively we need to communicate our views as widely as possible, and the ICBSS with its sufficient network and channels of communications with the outside world are the best venue for that. But the ICBSS needs to promote and participate in practical projects that creatively seek to harness the benefits of globalisation, and to communicate the results on how to fit and fix those developments to the regional landscape as widely as possible. That is how the BSEC will become an “enabler” of EU needs and in this way the BSEC will, someday in the future, become an equal partner with the EU. As I reiterated many times, the BSEC should be innovative, more active towards EU efforts to engage this organisation into more practical proposals, and more positive towards exploring together with EU experts and bureaucrats some hidden potential for positive interaction leading to concrete results. I understand that the BSEC is frequently too politicised and sensitive towards those issues. But on the other hand, the EU should go beyond those “synergy” approaches towards the Black Sea region and start thinking about some hard core and genuine strategy towards that area, as urged by Ambassador Sergiu Celac. The Black Sea region is not an EU neighbourhood but an essential part of the EU space through Greece, Romania, and Bulgaria, and the Black Sea itself is now EU body water! So why not to use the unique think tank capacity of the ICBSS and explore these perspectives in a more active and “out of the box” fashion?

Clearly, to find relevant and adequate answers to the aforementioned questions we would need to undertake some critical and unbiased analysis and assessments of our own activities. The ICBSS, for example, has already initiated a process of self-evaluation regarding the perspectives of its renovation and recalibration quite recently, but it has been just the beginning of a very complex and comprehensive process and we all need to cut much work to accomplish our goals. Therefore, I will try to summarise the key elements of that vibrant and ongoing process of perfection. Without that it will be more than difficult for the ICBSS to keep the high-level profile it has gained since its inception in 1998.

A case-study “ICBSS:” how to make it more relevant?

Through years of hard work, the ICBSS has become one of the leading think tanks on Black Sea issues in the world; it has been recognised by the international expert community; it is an institute with its distinct high-quality image, and reputation.

But there is always room for improvement, so how can we further improve that organisation? How can we make it more efficient, issue-oriented, and forward-thinking, an institution which is fully engaged into the global network of academia and think tanks? How can we raise its visibility in the worldwide arena as well as the awareness of the international community towards its capacity and competence? I think that these are valid questions to pose!

How should we proceed?

To begin with, the place of the Related Bodies within the BSEC architecture is unclear, both in terms of substance and in terms of procedure and protocol. The views of the Related Bodies are usually formally presented in the course of official CSO meetings whose agenda has been long burdened with urgent BSEC issues or matters of regional or strategic significance. Very rarely the concrete issues and problems of the BSEC Related Bodies are discussed at the level of the BSEC CMFA. Moreover, the participation of the BSEC Related Bodies in the sectoral BSEC Working Groups (WG) does not always convey a feeling of “value added,” mainly because the Related Bodies have not been granted a clear mandate in this connection.

Additionally, the BSEC Related Bodies do not converse with each other efficiently and productively. Firstly, there are no formal channels of communication, which means that cooperation among them is hostage to interpersonal relations and Ad hoc arrangements. Secondly, the communication that does take place is often mediated by the BSEC PERMIS which is already over-burdened with its own agenda and lacks both time and authority to operate as a “systemic manager.”

Ultimately, each BSEC Related Body leads its own “life,” pursues its own objectives, and has its own vested interests. Each of them has its own “patron saint,” usually from the cohorts of the leading BSEC member states (and concretely within the BSEC MFAs) who care about the budget and some operational issues. That is why the activities of the Related Bodies are frequently far too politicised. As we know, the ICBSS has in the past

attempted to initiate informal meetings amongst the BSEC Related Bodies in an effort to harness complementarity, synergies, and coordination. However, this objective still remains elusive.

So it is high time for us to discuss the recent developments in the Black Sea area as well as internal progress in the BSEC system among the BSEC Related Bodies. We need to “compare notes,” to share our own accumulated experience as well as to assimilate different perspectives and agenda priorities. The issues to discuss are many: the BSEC New Economic Agenda, the problems of green development/growth, good governance and many other lingering regional items that seem to stagnate rather than advance. We urgently need to discuss the internal structures and their efficiency with a view to achieving the BSEC’s ultimate goals. But we should do that in a quiet and informal way and the ICBSS should lead the process in this regard!

As noted, for example, in many BSEC WG meetings, member states do not actually send experts and, at times, they are not even represented. Moreover, there is a sense that WG participation is just “optional.” Thus a lot of time and resources are wasted on debates that are of a procedural nature rather than advancing the agenda set by the CSO or the CMFA. The only way to change this trend is to assign to the BSEC Related Bodies and specifically to the ICBSS the clear mandate of working to support each BSEC structure. This would allow the WGs to actually work; that is to concentrate on debating substantive issues and leave the pursuit of “technicalities” to a capable corps of people who have been trained to cooperate with the BSEC. This group of experts should work closely with liaisons from the member states coordinating structures, develop ideas and projects, raise funding, etc. The ICBSS should be in the centre, as a coordinator, of that process. These are just some general thoughts and considerations aiming to stimulate a joint initiative of the Related Bodies to assert their roles and harness their potential inside the BSEC structure.

As we speak, there is no such a thing as a pool of technocrats and experts that we can call “the BSEC people.” We have a pool of national appointees (mainly from the national MFAs who may well be brilliant political decision-makers but less qualified to discuss the myriad of BSEC “technical” issues such as environment, energy, good governance etc.). That overly bureaucratizes the BSEC discourse and I would say, entraps the BSEC process and its productivity in unnecessary and never-ending BSEC squabbles and disputes. To remedy this in part, we should have a more extended programme of “on-the-job” training experiences that allow for young officers to gain experience by working in BSEC member states; at the same time, we should also have a more active engagement of member

state officials delegated to BSEC Related Bodies and the BSEC-PERMIS for longer periods of time. In sum, we need a transnational/regional corps similar to the ones developed in Brussels (EU), New York (United Nations), etc. Needless to say that recruitment to any such position should follow international good practice of open, fair, and transparent selection processes that value merit before political or other affiliation.

Now let me share some observations on what needs to be done immediately to re-activate ICBSS internally.

First and foremost, the ICBSS should be transformed into a truly international regional think tank, which it is not at the present time. Due to some political and bureaucratic promulgation, and legal flops in its Statute, the Article 24 of the BSEC Charter has not been ratified yet by some BSEC member states, and that has been keeping the ICBSS in some kind of animated suspension, hindered by its ambiguous legal status of private non-profit organisation under Greek law and yet de facto related body of an international organisation. That, naturally, confines and reduces the capacity as well as the reputation of the ICBSS not only among the BSEC stakeholders but far beyond the Black Sea region, and makes its activities severely crippled, imbalanced, and less forward-engaged. I see the following problems in this connection, placing them into a strategic context:

- i) We need to identify anew the core mission, vision, and values of the ICBSS. Such a mission statement must be formalised in a BoD guidelines manual, delineating the daily routine of the ICBSS. Many things have changed since the Statute of the ICBSS was written: we live in a different, post-modern world and the ICBSS should operate accordingly within that strategic environment.
- ii) An obvious suggestion would be that the ICBSS should “translate” the priorities and objectives of (some of) the BSEC WGs into specific policy projects. Then the ICBSS could focus on policy development in cooperation with the Business Council and the Black Sea Trade and Development Bank (BSTDB).
- iii) The BoD has to identify in a more clear-cut manner its own role and mandate. Member state representatives serving on the Board must have substantive engagement and specific responsibilities, including the function of acting as liaisons with their own national administrative structures and lobbying for resources to be allocated for the fulfilment of objectives they agree upon.

- iv) Of course, there is the issue of funding in general and the unfortunate notion that donations entitle the use of the Centre for political purposes. That is not surprising of course, but it undermines the role of the ICBSS as an organisation, its credibility, and its opportunities to gain access to additional resources.
- v) Presently, it might be suggested that the ICBSS is anchored to the Hellenic Ministry of Foreign Affairs and we truly appreciate its leading role, especially its experience and expertise regarding the EU issues and problems and specifically the introduction of the green development and green growth concepts; yet the immediate “internationalisation” of the activities of the ICBSS is so urgent!
- vi) It should be acknowledged that recently the ICBSS has re-embarked on very thorny pass of changes and recalibration of its activities towards the post-modern policy-making and tries to provide useful advice and produces ideas as well as policy recommendations on the perspectives of the Black Sea region. The Management of the ICBSS endeavours to focus on the dual concept of “Knowledge” and “Sustainability” and engage the regional stake-holders into that political as well educational process and transfer will gradually form the basis of a coherent strategic plan for the region, comprised of clearly defined priorities and goals and to base this delicate process a new model promoting the principles of sustainable development, innovation, and good governance.
- vii) The ICBSS has been moving towards a “Green Black Sea” concept the key elements of which are development, culture, as well as economic and social prosperity but one that goes beyond the traditional approach and makes the concept of Sustainable Development / Greening, Innovation, and Governance the regional driving force. The ICBSS needs to use its regional outlook to foster what could be called a high-level globalisation “early warning system” and communicate its views as widely as possible.
- viii) All that is just some resolute beginning as in sum, to accomplish those noble goals the ICBSS should be built as an effective and efficient organisation in its own right. Of course this goes back to the issues above but there needs to be a sense of strategic management of internal human and financial resources, including clear objectives, competencies, and rules of engagement to fulfil them. On a tactical level, this implies definitions of performance and evaluation procedures that can feed back into planning, something that would be

part of any professionally managed organisation in the private, if not the public sector.

- ix) The posts (vacancies) at the ICBSS ought to be filled on merit alone, with a strong emphasis on political and diplomatic competence and managerial skills and approved by the ICBSS BoD.
- x) Why not create within the ICBSS or affiliated with it a group of “BSEC Wise Persons” (former Secretary Generals of the BSEC PERMIS, former Alternate Director Generals of the ICBSS, and many other experienced BSEC hands) in order to get together from time to time and discuss in a very informal environment some strategic regional issues and problems?
- xi) No organisation can be sustainable if it is run in an Ad hoc management lacking strategic vision and impact assessment. The notion of effective, efficient, and transparent operations is widely recognised also in the non-profit sector as ultimately organisations need to be held accountable for the way they use the funds entrusted to them.

A cross-reference: SOS call for the Black Sea environment

The previous Hellenic Presidency of the BSEC has again reaffirmed that within the context of regional development and economic cooperation, environmental security is an integral part of the overarching economic security. Meaning by environmental security the collective ability to protect each and all Black Sea region states from large-scale economic damage and/or intra- or inter-state political conflict caused by the unsustainable exploitation of natural resources including hydrocarbons, by ecological destruction from human activity, and/or "beggar-thy neighbour" environmental effects. This should not just turn into a one-term issue in the history of our Organisation as these regional environmental/green-growth policies should become indispensable building blocks of future developmental agendas in the Black Sea area in general and specifically in the BSEC. But we can only address these urgent challenges if we think about the bigger strategic picture and the growing interest of other international actors in the Black Sea region.

Notwithstanding the above, to achieve those noble goals, including the implementation of most sophisticated agreements and decisions, one should keep in mind what an ordinary Black Sea citizen, who has no idea not only about those official documents but about the existence of the

BSEC itself, experiences in his/her daily life and activities. We always try to think in our activities of in grand terms and forget within the daily routine some “small facts” occurring here and there in the Black Sea area. I hope that short list of dire ecological/environmental problems in our region will encourage and motivate us to be more resolute and coherent as well as sensitive towards the peoples of the region while making our decisions or delaying to make them.

While I am by no means an expert on these issues, as just an ordinary Black Sea citizen, I have been alerted with the recent adverse affects on the Black Sea environment reported by the Harvard Black Sea Security Program a while ago: droughts, flooding, extreme weather events, loss of coastal regions, reduced water supplies, decreased agricultural productivity, crop failures, and pandemics. All those developments in the Black Sea can create sustained natural and humanitarian disasters on a vast scale. As a result, conflicts over dwindling resources and mass migration may foster political instability. Environmental problems can make these impasses worse, further eroding confidence in the regional governments or the existing international fora and organisations, thus leading to political extremism, radical thought, domestic conflicts, and terrorist activities.

All these circumstances fall into the category of what I call non-traditional threats to security and in this regard the Black Sea has suffered a tragic decline in recent years, whether referring to fisheries, the state of the beaches, the colour of the sea, its smell or the state of the local economy, tourism or coastal landscape. The conclusions are usually the same: something has gone badly wrong in our area!

Pollution is the primary problem that the Black Sea faces, as it has become the drainage basin for the littoral nations which, according to the existing statistics collectively dump 600 million cm of waste into the Black Sea and its tributaries each year. As we know, there are more than 50 (if my memory serves me right) operational or under construction nuclear power stations within the Black Sea area and radioactive substances as well as the current level of radiation in that body of water can be as much as twice those of areas in the Mediterranean.

Yet the greatest source of pollution in the Black Sea is oil. According to the regional experts, every year 20 thousand tons of crude oil enters the sea from domestic plants, 16 thousand tons from industry, and approximately 53 thousand tons flow down the Danube. Thus, the threat of a major oil spill is always present and increasing. In addition to these traditional forms of pollution, there is the risk of pollution, according to the experts, from living organisms and species not native to the region. These come

primarily from ships emptying their ballast tanks into the sea, introducing organisms which may have no natural predators to control them.

All the above-mentioned issues are real global problems that the Black Sea region faces today and these are not some hypothetical conditions or developments that we may worry about sometime in the future. Therefore we all agree that the resolution of those dire problems requires better rules and guidelines to restrict and prohibit the existing practices. But to accomplish that we need better monitoring to identify existing and potential problems and violations of the rules as well as the strictest implementation of mutually agreed declarations and agreements.

Why do I say that? Because it is far easier to keep something from being broken than putting the pieces together once it is broken. So if the current Black Sea environmental problems are left unchecked, these conditions in the region will have devastating effects on large parts of the population and regional states, and may impact lives far beyond that concrete locale. Its interlinked effects could be social or economic affecting the livelihood of populations, access to sufficient food and water as well as public health, in terms of preventing the spread of diseases and the conditions that make the population susceptible to these diseases. And all those developments will likely lead to growing discontent among people and in combination with other factors could create a critical mass and potential for social unrest, migration, and the breeding grounds, as I noted above, for radicalism and terror.

A somewhat optimistic epilogue

Although the BSEC, as admitted above, has accomplished much throughout these twenty years, there are some solid benchmarks we can measure that success, but there were no fewer zigzags, even drawbacks, failures, and disappointments on that thorny and bumpy way. I believe that today is the most propitious time for thinking about the future of the entire BSEC system, and not only because of what the Organisation has or has not accomplished, but also because of the dramatically changed international environment, one in which there is a highly asymmetrical distribution of power in the region as well as the existence of various efforts intended to correct these imbalances.

We need to recognise that the BSEC is still just an intergovernmental body; it is still in the process of transforming into a truly international organisation. Naturally all those vibrant dynamics and developments within and around the BSEC impacted and are still affecting the efficiency,

productivity, and operability of the Organisation. Therefore, the BSEC needs to help itself initially with some fresh, innovative, and brand new strategic thinking that will eventually help its outside partners (the EU comes first to mind!) to assist the BSEC and its Related Bodies in playing a more positive role in the Black Sea region.

Hence I would like to repeat one more time that we urgently need to reform, re-invent the BSEC, and recalibrate resolutely its Related Bodies. We need to think purposefully and paradoxically unthinkable way and to project and navigate our assessments and judgement towards the forward-engagement approach, complex vision and the capacity to create a new BSEC agenda. To some it may appear to be the same journey we have embarked upon so many times throughout these twenty years and, unfortunately, frequently failed to conclude. So we should do our best to set a new course and get the BSEC not on some “new journey” but to some new destination! Alas, this is only possible if we all think the unthinkable and tackle the intractable as well as act not only in a logical manner to convince which in the BSEC case sometimes looks more than irrational.

So let us not be consumed by specific structures, outcomes or end-games. Let us just get on with the job and who knows, we may all be pleasantly surprised when we arrive at our eventual destination. That is the only way to reach that noble goal and, believe me, that game is still worth the candle, and the reward at the end of the day could be a new political and relevant order within the wider Black Sea area and far beyond it!

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Abbreviations

BoD	Board of Directors
BSEC	Organization of the Black Sea Economic Cooperation
BSEC CFMA	BSEC Council of Ministers of Foreign Affairs
BSEC CSO	BSEC Committee of Senior Officials
BSEC PERMIS	Permanent International Secretariat of the BSEC
BSS	Black Sea Synergy
EaP	Eastern Partnership
ENP	European Neighbourhood Policy
EU	European Union
ICBSS	International Centre for Black Sea Studies
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organization
USSR	Union of Soviet Socialist Republics
WGs	Working Groups

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