



PRESS RELEASE

Athens, 22 May 2020

ICBSS - BSEC WEBINAR

The International Centre for Black Sea Studies ([ICBSS](#)), in cooperation with the Organization for the Black Sea Economic Cooperation ([BSEC](#)) organised the webinar [*“Covid-19 crisis: is regional cooperation relevant in efforts to confront it? What could the role of international organisations be for the day-after in the Black Sea region?”*](#) on Tuesday 19 May 2020.

Distinguished panelists **Mr. Daniel MITOV**, f. Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Bulgaria, **Amb. George CIAMBA**, Ambassador of Romania to the Hellenic Republic and f. Minister for European Affairs of Romania, **Amb. Selim YENEL**, President of Global Relations Forum, **Dr. Sergei ZABELIN**, Senior Research Fellow at the Department for Black and Mediterranean Sea Studies, Institute of Europe, Russian Academy of Sciences, under the moderation of **Dr. George TZOGOPOULOS**, Senior Fellow at CIFE and Lecturer at Democritus University of Thrace, Greece discussed on **regional cooperation during the covid-19 pandemic and the role of international organisations in the challenging post - covid-19 era**, focusing on the Black Sea Region.

Overall, the discussion highlighted important issues for regional cooperation to be addressed in future discussions and deliberations. As underlined by **Dr. Tzogopoulos** on launching the event, it is an opportunity for the **Black Sea region to constitute an interesting example** on how countries can promote cooperation in order to overcome the obstacles at the public health sector and their economies, and the role of international organisations in this. Besides, Mr. Tzogopoulos **stressed the importance of synergies** in a period of rising uncertainty globally.

From his side, as noted in his opening remarks, **H.E. Amb. Michael B. CHRISTIDES**, Secretary General of BSEC PERMIS, being in charge of an international organization that promotes economic cooperation among its member-states, crisis periods highlight **the challenges for coordination, but also, allow for new opportunities to emerge**, a fact that applies not only in the Black Sea region, but also on international level. He then reflected on the “birth” of the idea for the organization of the webinar. *“The idea matured after the first month of the pandemic lockdown. I asked myself how this economic cooperation could be implemented under these dramatic conditions in order to address some of the most crucial challenges that all BSEC member-states faced, like the supply of vital health provisions, the exchange of important information concerning the pandemic, the transport of food and medical supplies [...] The current situation has shown the need for more cooperation and coordination, not only between states but also within the state, and has also provided us with several lessons of our approach on other issues such as the climate change”* he added. Concluding, Amb. Christides **expressed his hope that regional cooperation will come out stronger** at the end of the covid-19 pandemic.

From his perspective, **Mr. Mitov** listed the pandemic’s consequences for regional cooperation, such as the **“crisis of trust”** towards the governments’ coronavirus statistical data on public health, that could contribute to a possible isolation of the countries or the competition for the coronavirus vaccine among countries, that

could lead to a **“vaccine nationalism”** to be used as a geopolitical tool by the countries. Particularly commenting on the role of BSEC, Mr. Mitov emphasized the important role of international organisations. *“I believe BSEC has a lot of potential in the area of health care and sciences”* he added. Another tendency for Mr. Mitov is the **“concept of an absolute sovereignty”** that constitutes a threat for the international community and reflects the idea that the pandemic is a national issue instead of a matter of everyone. Following, the f. Minister analysed the **change of countries’ attitude towards China** in terms of political and economic dependence with consequences in trade balances. The **priority of the citizens’ security** and the limitation of their freedoms which they are ready to follow in the name of their safety as well as **the new technologies** that come into citizens’ lives as a permanent phenomenon, constitute also tendencies for Mr. Mitov. In addition, he mentioned that **regional formats** can promote the collaboration and can help the countries’ economies. Besides, he stressed the fact that **the expertise is now being valued more than the past**, as well as the must needed **change of the global institutions’ infrastructure**. As he noted, **the danger for a global pandemic has been neglected** for decades in national, regional and international level, given that the priority was on defense issues.

Ambassador Ciamba highlighted the interconnectivity and cohesion that should characterize the nations’ politics during and after the pandemic period, given the inevitable **financial uncertainty**. From the humanitarian perspective, Amb. Ciamba talked about the need for **cooperation development among neighbouring countries** and, especially among the BSEC countries when it comes to the Black Sea Region. Furthermore, he said that countries could share key industries and they should avoid any gestures that could disturb any kind of cooperation. The covid-19 crisis is also considered as a **chance for rapprochement** between countries according to the Ambassador. Moreover, Amb. Ciamba stressed the importance of the share of **good practices** that can **combat the fake news and the misinformation**. Finally, he talked about international organizations’ role during the pandemic and underlined that they should constantly support their member-states by adapting their activities accordingly.

Commenting on the role of the international organizations, **Amb. Yenel** noted that their actions were affected by their member-states’ policies during the pandemic as these were not based on **solidarity**. Regarding BSEC, Amb. Yenel proposed the creation of a BSEC Working Group on **disaster management** that could work on a **future crisis** as well as the distribution of some guidelines to the member states for a better management of a future crisis. Finally, he stressed that the **BSEC’s work is valuable**, something that should be reminded constantly to its member-states.

Dr. Zabelin focused on the role of the **nation states that should prove their role** within the global governance system and underlined the high importance of a **closer cooperation among all institutions within a country**. Additionally, he analyzed the consequences of countries’ policies for **migration**, economy and issues like the citizens’ freedoms. Summing up, Dr. Zabelin appeared optimistic regarding the **opportunities** that have emerged from the pandemic.

Following their interventions, the panelists answered to participants’ questions. In total, **85 participants from around the world joined the webinar**.

This constituted the first of a series of webinars planned by the ICBSS to launch a new era of online meetings on key issues targeting the wider Black Sea region. More information of the upcoming next webinar on blue growth will be announced in due course.

You may visit the [ICBSS channel on Youtube](#) to watch the full [Webinar](#)



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About the ICBSS: The International Centre for Black Sea Studies (ICBSS) was founded in 1998 as a non-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 serves as its acknowledged think-tank. Thus, the ICBSS pursues applied, policy-oriented research, promotes knowledge on the Black Sea region both within and outside its boundaries, and offers policy advice with the aim to foster multilateral cooperation among the BSEC member states as well as with their international partners.

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