

News from the Black Sea

Organization of the Black Sea Economic Cooperation

Permanent International Secretariat (PERMIS)



41st MEETING OF THE BSEC COUNCIL OF MINISTERS OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS



The 41st Meeting of the Council of Ministers of Foreign Affairs of the Organization of the Black Sea Economic Cooperation (BSEC), chaired by H.E. Mr. Nikos Dendias, Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Hellenic Republic, was held in Athens, on 13 December 2019.

The Ministers acknowledged the progress achieved during the outgoing Hellenic Chairmanship and underlined once again the importance of further developing regional economic cooperation in the wider Black Sea area.

For the *Resolutions, Decisions and Recommendations* adopted during the Council, please visit: www.bsec-organization.org

The meeting was concluded with the ceremonial transfer of the BSEC Chairmanship-in-Office to Romania, who assumed the relevant duties for a period of six months, from 1 January to 30 June 2020.

“Bridging Shores through Enhancing Cohesion”
Romanian Chairmanship-in-Office
(1 January – 30 June 2020)



The Romanian Chairmanship-in-Office got officially underway during the “Coordination Meeting of the BSEC Chairmanship-in-Office, the BSEC Committee of Senior Officials, BSEC Related Bodies and the BSEC PERMIS” held at the BSEC Headquarters, on 17 January 2020.

The Romanian Chair presented the priorities of the Chairmanship to the participants under the motto: “Bridging Shores through Enhancing Cohesion”, which illustrates Romania’s belief that the prerequisite for the future consolidation of the BSEC activities should be built around cohesion, interconnectivity and dialogue. It was stated that the Chairmanship will strive to forge a more result-oriented cooperation by building confidence and trust, encouraging dialogue and constructive action with the aim to take further steps in delivering the core mission of BSEC: shared prosperity through better connectivity within the region.

The full text of the priorities is available on: <http://www.bsec-organization.org/chairmanship> .



Art transcends boundaries and unites us!

A Drawing Competition aiming to acquaint 14-15 year-old students from BSEC Member States with the vision of a Black Sea region united through the challenges it faces was organized by the Hellenic Ministry of Education and Religious Affairs and was the first of its kind in BSEC history.

The theme of the Competition was “*Black Sea: the sea that unites us*”. Six BSEC countries were able to participate, each with one or more drawings. The winners were students from the Republic of Moldova.

It is the firm intention of BSEC PERMIS to encourage similar initiatives in the near future, with, hopefully, greater participation of the younger generation from all the BSEC Member States.



BSEC-EU meet annually to review cooperation and plan for the future.

The informal annual meeting of the BSEC Organization with the COEST Working Party of the EU (*The Working Party on Eastern Europe and Central Asia*) was held in Brussels, on 6 December 2019.

Almost all of the participants that took the floor reiterated the significance and value that this annual informal meeting has recently

acquired, providing a convenient framework for the regular overview of what has been achieved and for a useful exchange of views and proposals on further promoting the BSEC-EU cooperation in a balanced, practical and mutually agreeable way.

As it is by now widely acknowledged, the relationship between BSEC and the EU has attained a level which has to be preserved and further enhanced, as a concrete contribution to the promotion of peace, stability and prosperity in the sensitive Black Sea region.

THE REGIONAL STAKEHOLDERS CONFERENCE “BLACK SEA SYNERGY: THE WAY FORWARD”

The main objective of the conference, organized on 7 November in Athens by the *International Centre for Black Sea Studies (ICBSS)*, was to provide a platform for dialogue to stakeholders from EU Member States and non-EU Black Sea countries and to stimulate the discussion on the future of the Black Sea Synergy, a regional initiative created by the EU in 2008 with the aim to promote cooperation in the region, especially in areas such as Energy, Transports and Environment.

Almost 100 participants from the public and private sectors took active part in the four structured workshops (Culture and Tourism, Energy, Transport and Education), thus demonstrating the keen interest of all to contribute to the objectives of this important initiative. After lively deliberations many useful conclusions were drawn, which will be further elaborated and published in a Concept Paper by the ICBSS as a guide for the promotion of joint projects within the Black Sea Synergy.

The Conference gave many opportunities for networking between experts, scientists, entrepreneurs and organizations active in the region. BSEC PERMIS actively participated in the above Workshops.





Regional organizations met in Barcelona to discuss *Climate Change*.

The Coordination Meeting of Regional Organizations, hosted by the *Union for the Mediterranean (UfM)*, was held on 13 November 2019 in Barcelona with the participation of BSEC, the *Central European Initiative (CEI)*, the *Adriatic and Ionian Initiative (AII)* and the *Council of the Baltic Sea States*. This event is usually hosted every year by a different regional European Organization; it was the first time so few of the latter attended this useful coordination meeting, which helps regional international entities to exchange views on their activities and coordinate their efforts in order to avoid duplication and enhance effectiveness.

BSEC PERMIS was represented by the First Deputy Secretary General, Ambassador Selim Yenel; participants underlined the need for concerted action by international organizations in order to address the negative effects of climate change. Among other, it was argued that the melting of the Arctic ice is creating new trade routes that could render obsolete the old ones, thus causing possible economic and social upheavals. Rising sea levels will not only affect islands but also coastal cities, thus more regional cooperation and synergies are needed to address these risks.

Participants declared that they were ready for more joint projects which could be co-funded by organizations enjoying greater access to funding. It was agreed that focal points should be established in order to continue the exchange of views and experiences on a more regular basis.

The next Coordination Meeting of Regional Organizations will be hosted by the BSEC Organization in its Istanbul headquarters, most probably in 2020.

The Black Sea region and BSEC attract the interest of Canadian academic circles.

An expert panel event dedicated to *Regional Cooperation in the Wider Black Sea Area* was hosted by the Carleton University in Ottawa, on 2 December 2019 in order to discuss integration possibilities in the wider Black Sea area, including issues of economic development and security.

The event brought together prominent representatives from BSEC Member States, leading regional experts and students who shared their views on the establishment and activities of various regional inter-governmental organizations in the wider Black Sea area, especially that of the *Black Sea Economic Cooperation Organization (BSEC)*; Participants argued that

given the positive activity of similar entities, one can realistically expect that peaceful change in this sensitive, geostrategic region of our Globe could eventually be possible.

The BSEC PERMIS Secretary General, Ambassador Michael B. Christides, addressed the panel via video, providing general information on the BSEC Organization, its history and achievements, as well as on its vital role as a first-level confidence building mechanism in full action.



BSEC is eager to further develop cooperation with its Observers, Sectoral Dialogue Partners and with third parties.

1. Upon the invitation by H.E. Mr. Péter Sztáray, State Secretary of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade of Hungary, BSEC PERMIS Secretary General Ambassador Christides paid a visit to Budapest to discuss and identify the potential fields and forms of a future possible cooperation between BSEC and Hungary, a BSEC Observer State.

During their bilateral talks, H.E. Mr. Sztáray and Ambassador Christides had the opportunity to exchange views and proposals on how to promote concrete cooperation and agreed on the value of establishing closer working relations and exchanging preliminary views concerning the sectors in which they should concentrate their respective efforts.

(For further information, please visit: www.bsec-organization.org)



2. On 17 December 2019, the Consul General of the United States of America in Istanbul, Ms. Daria L. Darnell, paid a working visit to the BSEC Headquarters.

The Consul General was updated on the activities of the BSEC Organization and on its plans for the immediate future, as well as on the possibilities of “reviving” the *Memorandum of Understanding* signed between the parties in 2010, by considering the implementation of projects of common interest and benefit. The broader areas of climate change, marine litter, good governance, ICT and economy were mentioned as possible fields for future collaboration.



3. *The Ambassador of the Republic of Italy accredited to the Republic of Turkey, H.E. Mr. Massimo Gaiani, paid a working visit to the Headquarters of the BSEC PERMIS on 6 January 2020.*

Italy enjoys the Observer status to the BSEC Organization since 1995 and consistently follows the activities of the latter.

Ambassador Gaiani expressed his appreciation for the positive role the Organization is playing in the important yet unstable region of the wider Black Sea and reiterated his Government's interest in enhancing the cooperation between the two sides. Both interlocutors agreed to further explore ways and means for the timely and focused realization of their above common aspiration.



4. *With the aim to further enhance the working relationship of BSEC PERMIS with third States, many of which enjoy the status of *Observer* or *Sectoral Dialogue Partner* in the BSEC Organization, the Secretary General of BSEC PERMIS, Ambassador Michael B. Christides, accompanied by the responsible Executive Manager Mr. Alexei Nistrean, visited Ankara on 20-23 January 2020 where they held a series of meetings with the Ambassadors or Heads of Mission. They informed their distinguished interlocutors on the recent activities of the BSEC Organization and on the priorities of the Romanian BSEC Chairmanship-in-Office (first semester of 2020); the PERMIS Secretary General suggested a greater involvement from the side of the Observers and Sectoral Dialogue Partners in the activities of the Organization and informed on the ongoing and future projects and initiatives to be implemented in the BSEC region.*

During his meeting with the Ambassador of North Macedonia to Turkey, Ambassador Christides inquired on the proceedings of the internal Parliamentary procedure for the finalization of the accession of North Macedonia to the BSEC Organization, as the latter's 13th Member State. Both sides expressed the hope that this process will be completed during the first semester of 2020.

5. Within the framework of cooperation with third parties, the PERMIS Delegation also paid a visit to the headquarters of RTUK (*Turkish Radio and Television Supreme Council*) and held fruitful discussions with the newly appointed Secretary General of BRAF (*Black Sea Broadcasting Regulatory Authorities Forum*), Mr. Taha Yücel and the Vice President of the same Council, Mr. İbrahim Uslu.



EUROPE-CAUCASUS-ASIA CORRIDOR

Ambassador Traian Chebeleu, Deputy Secretary General of BSEC PERMIS, attended the International Conference dedicated to the 20th Anniversary of signing *the Basic Multilateral Agreement on International Transport for Development of the Europe-Caucasus-Asia Corridor (MLA)* and *the 14th Meeting of the Intergovernmental Commission (IGC) TRACECA*, which took place in Baku, on 5-6 December 2019.

He informed the participants on the implementation of the major BSEC infrastructure projects in the field of facilitation of road transport of goods, optimizing intermodal services and introduction of more automation and digitalization in the procedures concerning the transport of goods and services in order to achieve sustainable transport and mobility in the wider Black Sea area, the implementation of the *2030 UN Agenda* and the transport related Sustainable Development Goals.

Working visit to the Turkish Foreign Ministry



The BSEC PERMIS Secretary General, accompanied by the First Deputy Secretary General, Ambassador Mrs. Ebru Barutcu Gökdenizler, was received on 21 January 2020 by the Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs and Director for EU Affairs of the Republic of Turkey, H.E. Ambassador Faruk Kaymakçı, in the presence of officials of the related department of the Ministry.

The two sides exchanged views and discussed various important issues concerning the smooth functioning of the BSEC Organization and of its Secretariat.



Winter School on
Internet Governance,
Digital Policies
and Innovation */

Digitalization is transforming our life and therefore requires policy updates.

The non-governmental initiative *South Eastern European Dialogue on Internet Governance* (SEEDIG) together with the *National University of Political Studies and Public Administration* of Romania organized a “*Winter School on Internet Governance, Digital Policies and Innovation*” in Bucharest, on 9-13 December 2019, with the view to have its participants learn more about digital innovation, the impact of the internet and other digital technologies on society and the economy, as well as the multiple dimensions of digital policy and Internet governance of relevance for the region.

Invited by SEEDIG, Ambassador Traian Chebeleu, Deputy Secretary General of the BSEC PERMIS made a presentation on “*Regional cooperation among the BSEC Member States through ICT technics*”, mentioning the Organization’s efforts to support enhanced regional cooperation in this field.



Boğaziçi Zirvesi
Bosphorus Summit

ICP BOSPHORUS SUMMIT X

November 27th-29th 2019, CIRAGAN PALACE KEMPINSKI ISTANBUL

“Shifting the Economic Capacity of the Black Sea”

A panel on the above subject was for the first time and upon the initiative of the BSEC PERMIS, included in the program of the prestigious event “10th Bosphorus Summit” held by the *International Cooperation Platform* on 27 November 2019 in Istanbul.

The members of the Panel, moderated by the Secretary General of the BSEC PERMIS, Ambassador Michael B. Christides, discussed among other the following issues: what is the importance of the geo-economics of the Black Sea region? Can the Black Sea area offer an alternative economic cooperation opportunity for border countries?

What does the need for an effective multilateral Black sea diplomacy entail?

The panelists, among which was also the PERMIS First Deputy Secretary General Ambassador Selim Yenel, discussed the challenges facing the Black Sea region and agreed that solutions go beyond the capacity of one country and call for united and synchronized action. They noted the need for a greater sense of ownership and argued that the Black Sea region is at a critical juncture, which could evolve as a useful instrument of progress for the greater area. It was also pointed out that, as BSEC was the main organization dealing with many sectors (ranging from Energy to Trade to the Environment, among others), there should be greater support and inclusiveness from Governments, Academia and the private sector in the above efforts of BSEC.

“Transport Innovation for Sustainable Development”

Key international organizations met at the OECD Headquarters in Paris on 28 January 2020 at the event *2020 ITF Consultation with International Organizations* hosted by the International Transport Forum (ITF), to discuss the most significant issues to be addressed during the 2020 Summit *“Transport Innovation for Sustainable Development”* (Leipzig, 27 - 29 May 2020).

The BSEC PERMIS Secretary General, Ambassador Michael B. Christides, participated, for the second year in a row at the event and presented the views and aims of BSEC PERMIS regarding the forthcoming Summit in Leipzig.

On the sidelines of the above event, Ambassador Christides had a bilateral working meeting with the ITF Secretary General, H.E. Mr. Young Tae KIM during



which they discussed and exchanged views for further expanding the already close cooperation between their respective Organizations.

Profiting from his presence in Paris, the BSEC PERMIS Secretary General had also a bilateral meeting with the Deputy Director General of UNESCO H.E. Mr. Xing QU; among other issues of common interest, the prospects for concluding a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) between the two Organizations was also discussed.

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