



## PRESS RELEASE

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# Enhancing Connectivity in the wider Black Sea region: Presentation of the Priorities of the Hellenic Chairmanship-in- Office at the Organization of the Black Sea Economic Cooperation

On Tuesday 7 July 2026, the International Centre for Black Sea Studies (ICBSS) organised successfully an official event for the **Presentation of the Priorities of the Hellenic Chairmanship-in-Office at the Organization of the Black Sea Economic Cooperation (BSEC)**, with title **“Enhancing Connectivity in the wider Black Sea region”**. The event was hosted at the “Giannos Kranidiotis” Amphitheatre at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Hellenic Republic, in Athens, Greece.

On the occasion of the launch of the **Hellenic BSEC Chairmanship-in-Office**, the event presented the priorities and offered an overview of the programme of the Hellenic BSEC Chairmanship for the period 1 July – 31 December 2026.

On behalf of the Hellenic Chairmanship, **Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Hellenic Republic, H.E. Mr. Theoharis Theoharis**, delivered the keynote speech, outlining the priorities and objectives of the Hellenic Republic for the next six months. Opening his address, Mr. Theoharis underscored the significance of the BSEC Organization as the oldest, most representative, and institutionally mature institution in the wider Black Sea area. Mr. Theoharis continued placing emphasis on the core role of BSEC’s contribution, namely the notion that economic cooperation can serve as a bridge and not as a substitute for politics; as a practical forum for dialogue, trust, mutual understanding, and gradual convergence. To this end, as Mr. Theoharis pointed out, the theme of the Hellenic Chairmanship, **“Moving forward: Promoting regional economic cooperation in the wider Black Sea area”**, is more than just a motto; *“it is a political stance, a strategic choice, a call to responsibility”*.

In an unstable geopolitical environment, the Hellenic Chairmanship will leverage greater cooperation, that is more targeted, more effective, and more measurable, maintaining the institutional resilience of BSEC and increasing its practical value. *“This is the essence of the so-called “BSEC method”: dialogue, consensus, mutually acceptable solutions, and gradual, measurable, and practical results”*, Mr. Theoharis noted.

Concluding his intervention, Mr. Theoharis highlighted the **three main priorities of the Hellenic Chairmanship**, a) Promoting the implementation of the “BSEC Economic Agenda” b) Promoting the efficiency and effectiveness of BSEC, c) Promoting the project-oriented character of BSEC. He stressed that Greece assumes the Chairmanship with a sense of responsibility, aware of the difficulties, with respect for all Member States, and with confidence in the Permanent International Secretariat and the relevant bodies of the Organization, so that the Black Sea region remains a space for dialogue, connectivity, economic cooperation, and a shared vision.

In his speech on behalf of the BSEC Organization, **BSEC PERMIS Secretary General, H.E. Amb. Lazăr Comănescu**, expressed appreciation and gratitude to Greece’s continuous commitment and contribution to BSEC’s goals and principles. Ambassador Comănescu stressed that fostering security has an important economic dimension with opportunities to build longer cooperation, a strong basis to efforts for stability. He underlined that today, BSEC is asserted as a first-level confidence building mechanism and an asset for the entire region that offers possibilities to further build upon.

On behalf of the Hellenic Ministry of Foreign Affairs, **Mr. Dimitris Skalkos, Secretary General for International Economic Affairs**, outlined the diverse, project-oriented and impact-driven programme of the Hellenic BSEC Chairmanship, focusing on two key thematic priorities: a) enhancing connectivity in transport, energy, digital infrastructure and logistics, and b) promoting people-to-people contacts, prioritising cultural exchanges, educational cooperation and tourism.

During the second part of the event, representatives from the BSEC related bodies were invited to introduce their institutions and outline their anticipated contributions under the Hellenic BSEC Chairmanship.

On behalf of the Parliamentary Assembly of BSEC (PABSEC), **Vice-President and Head of the PABSEC Hellenic Delegation, Ms. Sofia Voultepsi**, presented the priorities of the Hellenic Chairmanship of PABSEC that will run in parallel to the Hellenic BSEC Chairmanship during the second semester of 2026.

From the Black Sea Trade and Development Bank (BSTDB), **Secretary General, Mr. Asterios Tsoukalas**, outlined the Bank’s extensive portfolio to enhance regional economic diplomacy in the wider Black Sea region. Mr. Tsoukalas noted that, since its establishment, the Bank has invested up to EUR 9.5 billion in national and regional projects.

Presenting the International Centre for Black Sea Studies (ICBSS), **Director General, Mr. Georgios Mitrakos**, outlined the Centre’s diverse plan of action, extending from multi-partnership projects and scientific events to academic publications and trainings, each designed to address pertinent issues across the wider Black Sea region. As he pointed out, in its 30 years, the ICBSS serves as a dynamic regional hub committed to continuity and

evolution, ensuring that all initiatives, from research to dialogue, generate real impact and strengthen synergies across the Black Sea region and beyond. Reiterating ICBSS' readiness to support the Hellenic Chairmanship substantially, Mr. Mitrakos stressed that, the Chairmanship is presented with a significant opportunity to work actively and collectively towards rebuilding trust, strengthening existing synergies and pursuing new ones to ensure that the BSEC region remains connected within broader European and international frameworks.

In the third part of the event, **Mr. Angelis Panopoulos, Director of the Private office of the Secretary General of Energy and Mineral Resources** of the Hellenic Ministry of the Environment and Energy and **Ms. Persefoni Ioannidou, Director General for Strategic Transport Planning and Road Safety** of the Hellenic Ministry of Infrastructure and Transportation, presented regional priorities in the sectors of energy and transportation, respectively, and outlined the Ministries' anticipated action plans in alignment with the priorities of the 2026 Hellenic BSEC Chairmanship.

Concluding the event, on behalf of the organisers, Mr. Georgios Mitrakos, ICBSS Director General, noted that the event underlined the active role of the Hellenic Republic as a BSEC Member State and demonstrated the commitment of the Hellenic Chairmanship to strengthening the Organization's role as a pillar of economic and political cooperation in the wider Black Sea region.

Mr. Mitrakos summarised the **main action areas** of the Hellenic BSEC Chairmanship, as follows:

### **1. Promoting the implementation of the "BSEC Economic Agenda"**

The implementation of the BSEC Economic Agenda has become a key priority, with the aim of ensuring the Organization's active presence in a constantly changing international environment.

### **2. Promoting the efficiency and effectiveness of BSEC**

Improving the organisation's effectiveness and efficiency is another key objective. The Hellenic Chairmanship has proposed a restructure of modalities to enable BSEC to respond flexibly to contemporary challenges.

### **3. Promoting the project-oriented character of BSEC**

Promoting the project-oriented strategy of BSEC is fundamental towards having tangible results. The Hellenic Chairmanship emphasises the importance of replenishing the BSEC Project Development Fund to this end.

### **4. Enhancing connectivity**

Connectivity among BSEC Member States, both in terms of infrastructure and digital networks, has emerged as a key factor in promoting growth. The Hellenic Chairmanship will focus on

strengthening the transportation, energy, and telecommunications sectors, with the aim of creating a more cohesive and competitive environment.

### **5. Promoting people-to-people contacts**

The importance of strengthening people-to-people cooperation was emphasised as a means of fostering mutual understanding and trust in the region. The Hellenic Chairmanship will promote initiatives that strengthen cultural dialogue, educational cooperation, and will encourage collaboration to promote tourism and enhance the attractiveness of the BSEC region.

### **6. Promoting the interaction of BSEC with partners and third parties**

The event highlighted the necessity to strengthen BSEC's interaction with other international organisations, partners, and third parties. Expanding these collaborations will contribute to the exchange of good practices to enable the development of multi-partnership solutions to address common problems.

### **7. Promoting the efficiency and effectiveness of BSEC**

It is important to effectively address existing, persistent issues within BSEC. The Hellenic Chairmanship is committed to serving as a catalyst for reaching common agreements and promoting solutions that meet the needs of the Member States.

The event was moderated by Mr. Nicholas Emirzas, Counsellor for Economic and Commercial Affairs at the B4 Directorate of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Hellenic Republic.

It was attended by **more than 100 stakeholders** from ministries, national agencies, academic institutions, policy and business representatives from Greece and representatives from the embassies of the BSEC Member States in Athens.

For more information about the Hellenic BSEC Chairmanship-in-Office, please visit

<https://www.bsec-organization.org/chairmanship>

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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 Organization of the Black Sea Economic Cooperation (BSEC), and its 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 of fostering multilateral cooperation among the BSEC member states as well as with their international partners.