



ORGANIZATION OF THE BLACK SEA ECONOMIC COOPERATION

Permanent International Secretariat

BS/WG/ICT/R(2020)1

REPORT OF THE MEETING OF THE BSEC WORKING GROUP ON INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGIES

Videoconference, 12-13 November 2020

1. The Meeting of the BSEC Working Group on Information and Communication Technologies was held online on 12-13 November 2020.
2. The Meeting was chaired by Ms. Adelina OGNANSKA, Senior Expert in International Cooperation, IT and Communications Department, European Coordination and International Cooperation Directorate, Ministry of Transport, Information Technology and Communications of Bulgaria.
3. The Meeting was attended by the representatives of the following BSEC Member States:

Republic of Armenia
Republic of Azerbaijan
Republic of Bulgaria
Georgia
Hellenic Republic
Romania
Russian Federation
Republic of Turkey
Ukraine
4. The representative of the Microsoft Innovation Centre of Armenia attended the meeting as Guest.
5. The List of Participants of the Meeting is attached as **Annex 1**.
6. The draft Agenda of the Meeting was discussed and adopted. The Agenda, as adopted, is attached as **Annex 2**.

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AGENDA ITEM 2: CONSIDERATION OF THE ACTION PLAN OF THE WORKING GROUP

7. The participants considered, amended and approved the Action Plan, elaborated and presented by the Republic of Bulgaria as the Country-coordinator of the Working Group on Information and Communication Technologies.
8. The Action Plan, as approved by the Working Group, is attached as **Annex 3**.

AGENDA ITEM 3: IMPORTANCE OF ICT IN THE CONTEXT OF THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

9. Under this Agenda item the participants discussed the importance of the ICT sector in light of the recent developments of the COVID-19 pandemic.
10. The representatives of the BSEC Member States mentioned that the pandemic caused by the COVID-19 affected the countries of the region, their economies and individual people. Many sectors of the economy in the BSEC Member States suffered from the impact of the pandemic; many companies reduced their activities; restrictive measures have been imposed on small business and people. The representatives of the BSEC Member States to the Working Group stated that the ICT sector and its infrastructure were crucial for reducing the negative influence of the pandemic on many sectors of the economy.
11. The representatives of Bulgaria, Azerbaijan, Georgia and Turkey informed the meeting on the activities and measures of their relevant Ministries and agencies during the outbreak of the pandemic. It was mentioned that the telecommunications sector, along with the health and food sectors, were among the most important sectors of the national economies that supported companies and private citizens. The information and communication infrastructure has increased its capacity, in some countries up to 40%, and assisted in conducting the business activity remotely, setting up the educational platforms for learning on-line, expanding the e-commerce and connecting via videoconference public and private companies as well as the ordinary people. The information provided by the Republic of Turkey is attached as **Annex 4**.
12. The Working Group invited the Member States that did not take the floor to send to PERMIS the information on the activities of their national institutions responsible for ICT in the context of COVID-19 pandemic.

AGENDA ITEM 4: ELABORATION AND PROMOTION OF THE PROJECTS IN THE FIELD OF ICT

13. The Working Group took note of the activities of the Project Development Fund (PDF) and the Black Sea Project Promotion Facility (BSPPF) aimed at financing project proposals in various fields of cooperation, including in the field of ICT.
14. The representative of the Microsoft Innovation Centre of Armenia made a presentation on the outcome of the project "Data-driven solutions for SMEs" funded by the Black Sea Project Promotion Facility (BSPPF). The presentation is attached as **Annex 5**.

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15. The Working Group encouraged public and private entities from the Member States to make use of the available mechanisms for project financing and submit the potential project proposals in the field of ICT to the PERMIS.

AGENDA ITEM 5. EXCHANGE OF INFORMATION ON THE LEGAL REGULATION OF THE ELECTRONIC DOCUMENTS, ELECTRONIC CERTIFICATION SERVICES AND ELECTRONIC SIGNATURES

16. The participants exchanged information on the legal regulations related to the use of electronic documents, electronic certification services and electronic signatures in their respective countries.
17. The delegation of Georgia stated that the national requirements for the electronic signature are similar to the requirements of the EU and that Georgia is ready to cooperate with other BSEC Member States for the recognition of the electronic signature.
18. The delegation of Bulgaria stated that after a detailed consideration of the issue and bearing in mind that Bulgaria is a member of the European Union, it became clear that such mutual recognition of electronic signature certificates is possible, from the point of view of EU member states, only with an agreement between the EU and a third country and that the negotiations on the potential agreement shall be conducted by the European Commission.
19. The delegation of Azerbaijan made a presentation on “Digital transformation in Azerbaijan: state of play and future priorities”, referring to the activities of the National Certificate Service Centre of Azerbaijan, its structure and new-generation identity card, as well as to the bilateral agreements concluded on the mutual recognition of electronic signature. The presentation is attached as **Annex 6**.
20. The Working Group concluded that interested Member States, where applicable, may proceed bilaterally for concluding agreements on the mutual recognition of electronic signature.
21. The Working Group agreed to discuss the issue at its next Meeting.

AGENDA ITEM 6. ESTABLISHMENT OF COOPERATION ON ICT INNOVATION AND START-UPS

22. The participants discussed the possible ways and means of establishing the cooperation and interaction among the ICT start-ups in the Member States.
23. The representative of Azerbaijan made a presentation on “Establishing cooperation on ICT innovation and start-ups” in which the proposal of cooperation between the innovation agencies of the Member States was mentioned, as well as the elaboration of a project proposal concerning the establishment of the BSEC Innovation Network and the consideration of the proposal for the possible harmonization of ICT market and sharing information on start-ups. The presentation is attached as **Annex 7**.

24. The participants took note of the ideas and proposals expressed in the presentation and decided to consider their applicability at the next meeting.

AGENDA ITEM 7: ANY OTHER BUSINESS

25. Under this Agenda item PERMIS informed the participants on the Korea-BSEC ICT Cooperation Program, which is organized every other year, the last one being organized and hosted in Seoul on 11-15 November 2019.

26. The representative of the Republic of Bulgaria informed the participants that due to the outbreak of the pandemic, the Expert Level Seminar on Digital Transformation, initially scheduled for 11 June 2020 in Sofia, had to be postponed for the next year.

AGENDA ITEM 8: DATE AND VENUE OF THE NEXT MEETING

27. The date and the venue of the next Meeting will be communicated in due time by the BSEC PERMIS, after consultations with the Chairmanship-in-Office and the Country-coordinator.

AGENDA ITEM 9: ADOPTION OF THE REPORT OF THE MEETING

28. The participants adopted the present Report for its submission to the Meeting of the Committee of Senior Officials.
