

News from the Black Sea

Organization of the Black Sea Economic Cooperation

Permanent International Secretariat (PERMIS)



40th MEETING OF THE BSEC COUNCIL OF MINISTERS OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS (Sofia, 28 June 2019)



The Republic of Bulgaria, hosted the “40th Meeting of the BSEC Council of Ministers of Foreign Affairs (40th CMFA)”, at the end of which, it handed over the BSEC Chairmanship to the Hellenic Republic (lasting from 01.07. to 31.12.2019).

The 40th CMFA was presided by H.E Ms. Ekaterina Zaharieva, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Bulgaria, and was attended by Ministers, Deputy Ministers and other high-level representatives of the twelve BSEC Member States, its Related Bodies, Observers, Sectoral Dialogue Partners and other guests.

Apart from praising the efforts of their Bulgarian colleagues for an exceptionally successful chairmanship, the members of the Council discussed and approved decisions on various important issues; among the most important was the unanimous invitation extended to the Republic of North Macedonia, following the relevant application of the latter, to accede to the BSEC Charter in order to become the 13th Member of the Organization. It is worth noting that the Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of North Macedonia, H.E. Mr. Nicola Dimitrov, participated in the event as a guest.

A first in BSEC-EU history!

The first ever *“High-Level Conference on BSEC - EU Cooperation”*, co-organized by the BSEC PERMIS and the European Commission’s Directorate for Neighbourhood and Enlargement Negotiations (DG NEAR), within the framework and with the support of the Bulgarian BSEC Chairmanship-in-Office and the Romanian Presidency of the Council of the European Union, was hosted in Brussels on the 18th of June 2019 with the participation of several Ministers from both sides.

All dignitaries underlined the importance of the BSEC-EU cooperation in the wider Black Sea region and stressed the fact that the relationship between the two has acquired a focused and project-oriented character, especially by the promotion of bottom-up economic policies and the direct involvement of interested stakeholders of the region. Many participants expressed the hope that this first event can be institutionalized and repeated in regular intervals in the future, with a jointly prepared agenda of concrete cooperation initiatives and projects.

The Conference was attended by more than hundred and twenty participants and attracted the interest of the media in many BSEC Member States.



BSEC PERMIS was for the second time present in the important yearly Transport Summit in Leipzig to discuss the future of transports through the prism of: *“Transport Connectivity for Regional Integration”*.



This year's ITF Annual Summit was held under the Presidency of the Republic of Korea on 22-24 May 2019 in Leipzig, with the participation of around 1400 participants from more than 80 countries.

An *Informal Meeting of the Ministers of Transports and Heads of Delegation from the BSEC Member States* present in Leipzig was organized as a side event to the Summit. The Meeting was chaired by Mr. Rosen Jeliakov, Minister of Transport, Information Technology & Communications of Bulgaria and was attended by the Ministers and Deputy Ministers of six BSEC Member States, as well as the Secretaries General of BSEC-URTA, ITF, IRU and BSEC PERMIS. The participants exchanged views on current transport developments in the BSEC Region, on the significance of the BSEC projects on the development of the *Black Sea Ring Highway*, the *Motorways of the Sea* and the *Facilitation of Road Transport of Goods*, especially in what concerns better regional and Euro-Asian connectivity.

Together with the *China Highway and Transportation Society (CHTS)* and the *International Road Federation* the BSEC PERMIS hosted a high-level debate on *"The Belt & Road Initiative (BRI): Bridging the gaps for sustainable transport and growth in Eurasia"*. During the debate, participants focused on the measures that must be implemented to incentivize investments in the BRI projects, requirements to create conducive environments for the development of sustainable transport infrastructure projects and the ways to maximize the international cooperation and coordination.

Major BSEC transport projects, their state of implementation, as well as the present-day and future plans concerning the overall transport and trade facilitation in the region were presented at the BSEC stand under the label *"The BSEC Organization: point of reference for regional cooperation"* which attracted the attention of the many participants visiting the Summit event.



“Although the digital transformation of the ever-more-important Tourism industry is inevitable and desirable, the main leading factor remains the human-being himself...”

This was the main conclusion reached at the prestigious “World Tourism Forum Lucerne 2019”, which took place in Lucerne, Switzerland from 2-4 May 2019.

The event was centered around “Human capital in an Age of Disruption: Talent, Innovation and Diversity” and was attended by a great number of Government representatives, ambassadors, academics, business

stakeholders and experts from around the world who took part in the numerous main panels and other parallel sessions hosted in the Lucerne Cultural Centre.

BSEC was represented by Secretary General Ambassador Michael B. Christides, who had the opportunity to exchange views on the possible closer cooperation of the PERMIS with the WTFL and other entities, in order to diversify and enrich its activities in the important Tourism sector.

An interesting and significant moment of the Forum was the interview of the “Surprise Guest” of the meeting, who turned out to be 16-year old Isabel Wijzen from Bali, Indonesia who, together with her sister, have managed to promote, first on their native Bali island and later all over the world, the “Bye-Bye Plastic Bags” (BBPG) social movement of young people, whose main goal is to keep the beautiful coastlines of our countries free from plastics.



Around 500 participants from over 100 countries and international or regional organizations attended the 5th edition of the *World Forum for Intercultural Dialogue* (WFID), which is an important platform for enhancing and revitalizing global partnerships; this year it focused on the role of Intercultural Dialogue in addressing the challenges of discrimination, exclusion and violent conflict.

In addition to a number of panels and numerous breakout sessions, there was a High-Level Ministerial Panel with the subject of “Mobilizing intercultural dialogue for concrete transformative action”. The main goal of the said Panel was to identify the preconditions for successful ICD, to examine the societal preconditions for its success between people and communities and the important inter-connected role of regional, national and local governments. PERMIS First Deputy Secretary General, Ambassador Selim Yenel, attended the Panel where he made a statement emphasizing on the importance of dialogue, empathy and tolerance.

Culture as an important tool in international relations.

This was the main focus of the event “*Connecting Cultures - Shaping a Creative Future for Georgia and Europe*” held in Tbilisi on 6 May 2019, initiated and supported by the Ministry of Education, Science, Culture and Sport of Georgia.

Besides the various panels, BSEC PERMIS First Deputy Secretary General Ambassador Selim Yenel participated in a very interactive High-Level Panel Discussion session, which underlined the positive role of Culture and its ever-increasing significance in the field of international relations.

During his intervention, Ambassador Yenel pointed out that Culture is not only about artistic developments, but also about how the people of a country respond to cultural events in which values such as tolerance, understanding, acceptance and empathy play an important role.



CONFERENCE ON “SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT AT THE BLACK SEA” (Bucharest, 8-9 May 2019)



The Conference was organized jointly by the Romanian Presidency of the European Union and the European Commission. It brought together Representatives from the marine and maritime sector, regional organizations and initiatives, universities, researchers, as well as NGOs.

During the Conference, the “*Strategic Research and Innovation Agenda for the Black Sea*” (SRIA) was launched by the six littoral Black Sea States and the Republic of Moldova (all BSEC Member States) in order: to guide academia, funding agencies, industry, policy and society to address together the fundamental Black Sea challenges; to promote Blue Growth and economic prosperity in the Black Sea region; to build critical support systems and innovative research infrastructure as well as to improve education and capacity building.

BSEC PERMIS was represented by Secretary General, Ambassador Michael B. Christides who during his intervention underlined the fact that BSEC PERMIS was part of the expert group developing SRIA (since its inception in 2017) and explained that is a home-grown initiative.

The “*Bucharest Declaration*” was presented at the end of the Conference by the Romanian side.

Ambassador Christides held on the sidelines of the event, a working meeting with the Secretary General of BSUN, Professor Eden Mamut and the responsible chairperson of the *Sustainable Development Solutions Network Black Sea* (“SDSN Black Sea”) at the Aristotle University of Thessaloniki, Professor Nicolaos Theodosiou. The main item of their discussion concerned the coordinated and more effective introduction of the need to implement the 2030 UN SDGs in the everyday agenda of governments, academic institutions, NGOs, private businesses and other social entities. In this sense the importance of rationalizing-homogenizing the data collected, harmonizing the monitoring process and enhancing the cross-border sharing of data and information was particularly highlighted.

Helping BSEC Member States on how to attract more Chinese tourists to the Black Sea region.

A “*Seminar on Prospects for Increased Chinese Tourism to the BSEC Region*” was held on 14 May 2019 at the BSEC Headquarters upon the initiative of BSEC PERMIS and with the generous financial assistance of the *Ministry of Culture and Tourism of the Republic of Turkey*; the *World Tourism Organization (UNWTO)* extended its valuable expert support for the event.

The goal of the Seminar was to explore and show ways and means of attracting more visitors from the biggest tourism market, i.e. from China, to the wider BSEC region and, thus, serve as an important facilitator in that direction.

Around 60 participants from BSEC Member States, both from Ministries and National Authorities in charge of Tourism, as well as from tourism associations, airlines and private stakeholders interested in attracting Chinese visitors to the Region attended the Seminar and exchanged information and experience with a view to identifying both the opportunities and the challenges of attracting more Chinese tourism to the Black Sea region.

The concluding remarks were formulated by Ambassador Selim YENEL, First Deputy Secretary General of BSEC PERMIS and Mr. Zhu SHANZHONG, Executive Director of the UNWTO.



EUROPEAN MARITIME DAY 2019, LISBON, 16-17 MAY

The “European Maritime Day” is the annual two-day event during which Europe’s maritime community meets to network, discuss and forge joint action in areas of common interest. It targets maritime professionals, entrepreneurs and ocean leaders from businesses, governments, public institutions, NGOs and academia. This year’s edition was focused on **blue entrepreneurship, research, innovation and investment** to boost sustainable technologies and emerging value chains in the wider ocean economy. The event was attended by almost 1500 participants from all European sea basins, including the Black Sea.



During the event, BSEC PERMIS was actively involved in the organization of two important Workshops: “Cross-basin research and innovation collaboration” and “Improving Access to Finance for Blue SMEs”.



Further to the above, BSEC PERMIS participated with its own stand to the event, through which information on relevant BSEC activities and initiatives was disseminated to numerous interested visitors.

Rapidly growing worldwide Tourism and the enormous development potential that the wider Black Sea region offers.

The BSEC PERMIS Secretary General, Ambassador Michael B. Christides, was invited by the Minister of Tourism of the Republic of Bulgaria, H.E. Ms. Nikolina Angelkova and the Former Secretary General of the UNWTO, Dr. Taleb Rifai, to participate at the international event *“Investing in Tourism Sustainability Conference”* (ITSC), held in the Bulgarian Black Sea Resort *Sunny Beach* on 30-31 May 2019.

Ministers and Deputy Ministers as well as other high-ranking dignitaries of countries in South-East Europe and the wider Black Sea region presented the accomplishments of their countries in the overall Tourism and Hospitality sectors, spoke about their imminent plans and underlined the importance of cooperation among regions and states.

In his intervention, BSEC PERMIS Secretary General stated that Tourism is the most effective way to establish contacts, dialogue and understanding among people, apart from its growing role as an economic locomotive for many of the BSEC Member States.

The overall conclusion of this important event was that countries in the Black Sea region can and should do more in order to attract the interest of the global Tourism Industry to their unique cultural heritage and natural beauties, as well as to their attractive social and popular traditions. As Ambassador Christides underlined, a better and more focused “branding” of the region could be a catalyst to achieve the above.



23rd St. Petersburg International Economic Forum

The President of China H.E. Mr. Xi Jinping, the President of Bulgaria H.E. Mr. Rumen Radev, the Prime Ministers of Armenia H.E. Mr. Nikol Pashinyan and of Slovakia H.E. Mr. Peter Pellegrini, the UN Secretary General H.E. Mr. Antonio Guterres were among some of the most distinguished guests of the 23rd St. Petersburg International Economic Forum, held on 6-8 June 2019, and hosted by the President of the Russian Federation, H.E. Mr. Vladimir Putin.

The BSEC PERMIS was represented for the second time in a row by its Secretary General, Ambassador Michael B. Christides at this prestigious event, which provides every year a unique platform for engagement and talks between global political and business leaders, high representatives of Governments, CEOs of multinational and other big companies, experts and well-known journalists, in order to address, debate and seek effective solutions to the pressing issues concerning the global and the Russian economic agenda.

On the side-lines of the countless panels and specialized sessions included in the program of the event, Ambassador Christides had the unique opportunity to liaise with a big number of dignitaries, potential interlocutors and partners of the PERMIS.



The Central European Initiative (CEI) celebrated its 30th anniversary!



The CEI celebrated its 30th anniversary at its *Meeting of the Ministers of Foreign Affairs* held in Trieste, Italy on 12 June, 2019.

BSEC PERMIS was represented at this important event of its long-term cooperation partner, by First Deputy Secretary General Ambassador Selim Yenel.

The deliberations of the Meeting were mainly focused on relations with the EU, with a special emphasis on the Western Balkans. Almost all supported the European Commission's proposal to open accession negotiations with Albania and North Macedonia. In addition some delegates called for advancement in Montenegro and Serbia's accession process. The positive role the Western Balkan countries played on migration was also pointed out.

At the end of the meeting the *Trieste Declaration* was approved.

THE 2ND PLOVDIV ECONOMIC FORUM (Plovdiv, 26-27 June 2019)

The 2nd Plovdiv Economic Forum was held on 26-27 June 2019 with the participation of high-level speakers and guests such as H.E. Boyko Borissov, Prime Minister of the Republic of Bulgaria, H.E Ms. Ekaterina Zaharieva, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs of Bulgaria, as well as other Ministers, Ambassadors, Executive Officers, Businessmen, from various countries, including BSEC Member States.

The BSEC PERMIS Secretary General, Ambassador Michael B. Christides was invited to speak together with the Bulgarian Minister responsible for Transports, H.E. Mr. Jeliaskov, at the panel focused on *“Infrastructure and Connectivity in Bulgaria and the region”*; among other, he underlined the necessity for a better transports and connectivity infrastructure on the regional level and emphasized that, in order to achieve the above, BSEC Member States should take advantage of the institutionally mature and trustworthy “vehicle” that is the BSEC Organization.





HELLENIC BSEC CHAIRMANSHIP-IN-OFFICE

(1 July – 31 December 2019)

The Hellenic 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 4 July 2019 and chaired by H.E. Ms. Ioanna Efthymiadou, Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary, Head of the B2 Directorate for Economic Relations with SE Europe, CIS and the BSEC countries of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Hellenic Republic.

H.E. Dr. Ioannis BRACHOS, Secretary General for International Economic Relations of the Hellenic Foreign Ministry, presented the **Priorities of the Chairmanship** to the participants under the motto: “*Black Sea, Green Energy, Blue Growth*”. He underlined that the Hellenic Chairmanship will seek to further the economic cooperation among BSEC Member States in a sustainable manner and with due regard to the environment. He further stated that Greece will focus on the need of enhancing the project-oriented character of BSEC, in order to achieve a more pragmatic multilateral cooperation among the Organization’s Member States (*the complete text of the priorities is available on the BSEC website*).

BSEC PERMIS highly welcomed the kind gesture of the Hellenic Chairmanship in presenting to the Secretariat, on the occasion of their Chairmanship, the statuette of Heracles - the divine hero in Greek mythology. The said statuette is being displayed at the Headquarters.



SOME EVENTS COMING UP IN THE NEXT ISSUE:

- Informal Meeting of the BSEC Ministers of Foreign Affairs - *New York, September 2019*. The said Meeting will be held on the sidelines of the United Nations General Assembly.



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