

ADDRESS OF THE BSEC PERMIS SECRETARY GENERAL

“E-Commerce Online Seminar for SMEs from the Black Sea Region”
through Zoom Videoconference on 21 September 2020 at 14:00-17:00 (Moscow Time)

First of all I wish to congratulate the organizers, Global Rus Trade company, for hosting this very important event, for the benefit of SMEs in the wider Black Sea region.

I also wish to thank them for inviting me to address the participants, as the Secretary General of the *Permanent International Secretariat of the Black Sea Economic Cooperation Organization* (BSEC PERMIS). As you know, BSEC is a full-fledged regional organization operating for about three decades now, promoting the economic cooperation among its Members and beyond. Thus, the topic of the Seminar falls under priority areas of our Organization, namely, the *“Intensification of Intra-regional Trade”* and the *“Support for the Sustainable Development of the SME Sector”*.

Almost 3 years back, BSEC established through the generous donation of 1 million USD by the Russian Federation the *Black Sea Project Promotion Facility* (BSPPF), a mechanism in order to fund development projects with the broadest possible impact in the region. One of the most significant projects selected for funding was the one proposed by Global Rus Trade company titled *“E-Commerce Opportunities for SMEs: Boosting Exports and Opening New Markets”*.

Today’s Seminar is the final act on the long implementation road of the project. Of course, the original idea was to host all participants here, in beautiful Istanbul and, thus, give them the opportunity to exchange, **in person**, views and good practices on how to enhance the efficiency, productivity and trade-capacity of our SMEs which, as we all know, form the **backbone** of the national economies of our BSEC Member States.

Unfortunately, due to the Covid-19 outbreak and its ramifications on the entire social and economic life in all countries, this is not the case and we all have to try and benefit from the **virtual** hosting of this important seminar.

By the way, the **BSEC** Organization has high on its agenda the issue of cooperation among Member States in the field of *electronic commerce* and

is currently considering the establishment of a relevant **Framework for BSEC E-commerce Cooperation**; I believe that today`s Seminar can certainly benefit the deliberations in the relevant BSEC Working Group. I also hope that Global Rus Trade Company can contribute in our above effort, given its vast experience in this field.

The **BSEC Working Group on SMEs** is the one directly involved in promoting the overall cooperation in this vital sector. It is composed of representatives / government officials who are in charge of national SMEs policies and for the development of relevant supportive programs in the BSEC Member States. Its mission is to help create a favorable business environment; to foster entrepreneurship and to promote cooperation among SMEs in the BSEC region. The current country coordinator of the Working Group on SMEs is the Russian Federation.

As I mentioned at the beginning of my intervention, this Seminar on means and ways to boost E-Commerce is, especially now-a-days, even more significant and useful, for obvious reasons; let me mention only one:

During the COVID-19 period, the end of which cannot be even seen at the end of this pandemic-tunnel, the SMEs were the most vulnerable and most affected sector of the Economies of our BSEC Member States; **and they continue to be!** The severe crisis has forced Governments to take drastic measures in order to contain the spread of the virus, measures that have brought the economies of countries to a near standstill. SMEs especially saw a dramatic downturn in their revenues, while their financial commitments to suppliers, employees and lenders depleted their already small liquidity buffers.

In this dire situation Governments took various measures to financially stabilize the SMEs, like implementing new funding programs, easing tax pressures, etc. And, of course, we all reverted, to a much greater extend, to virtual - online - activities.

Today, the Seminar we are going to follow will hopefully open the door to a **more substantial and beneficial use** of the Internet - World: it will help us get the necessary knowledge and capabilities in order to increase the radius of the SMEs` activities, multiply their **export capacity** by using a well-established platform and, thus, reach into new, even far-away,

markets; all this, only by **the intelligent use of technology that already exists!**

In conclusion, we in BSEC PERMIS are confident that the tangible outcome of today's effort will surpass expectations. In fact, we hope to be able to include the conclusions and recommendations of today's Seminar as items of further deliberation in the agenda of our relevant Working Groups.

Finally, should participants in today's event decide that this was a useful and rewarding experience, we in BSEC PERMIS will be ready to support and promote a similar event in the near future.

So, Good luck to all of you and thanks again to the organizers and especially to Mrs. Anna Nesterova, Chairperson of the Board of Directors of Global Rus Trade Company.