



# ORGANIZATION OF THE BLACK SEA ECONOMIC COOPERATION

## Permanent International Secretariat – The Secretary General

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STATEMENT BY THE SECRETARY GENERAL OF THE  
PERMANENT INTERNATIONAL SECRETARIAT  
OF THE BLACK SEA ECONOMIC COOPERATION ORGANIZATION  
AMBASSADOR MICHAEL B. CHRISTIDES  
AT THE 43<sup>rd</sup> MEETING OF THE  
BSEC COUNCIL OF MINISTERS OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS  
(30 JUNE 2021, VIRTUAL)

Dear Ministers, Excellences, ladies and gentlemen,

My 2nd term as the SG of the BSEC PERMIS ends today; this is the last time I have the privilege to address you during a meeting of the CMFA and I really regret that I do not have the honor and pleasure to thank and bid farewell to you in person, due to the persisting Covid pandemic!

I will not burden you with the achievements of BSEC and its Secretariat during the last 6 months, under the outstanding chairmanship of Albania; H.E. Ms. Minister XHAÇKA has already given a comprehensive picture on all that was accomplished during this challenging period. I wish to sincerely thank the Minister and all her colleagues in the Albanian MFA for their spirit of cooperation, for their commitment and dedication to perform their mission in the best possible way. **This** was the **first** example of the so-called “Secretariat-Assisted Chairmanship” and, indeed, it was a **huge success**, setting a very **encouraging** precedent for the future.

Ladies and gentlemen, allow me to express some thoughts and suggestions that are the essence of my precious 6-year-long experience while trying to promote the objectives of the BSEC organization.

**Despite** the difficulties and severe challenges, we all are aware of, I tried my very best not to betray the trust with which BSEC Ministers honored me with, dedicating all my energy for the establishment of BSEC as a **sought-after interlocutor** and **trust-worthy partner** on the international scene. I sincerely believe that today BSEC has matured into a **reliable** regional vehicle for the promotion of various projects, as well as into a valuable platform for more dialogue and understanding among its Member States and their people.

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International entities and third countries are seeking today the BSEC Organization and its Secretariat for the joint formulation and implementation of development programs benefiting the wider Black Sea region. Only from the beginning of 2021 and for the next 4-year period, the BSEC PERMIS **is - or will be** - actively involved – **alone or with other partners** - in the implementation of projects worth **more than 50 million Euros**, almost 28-times its annual budget!

As a **further recognition** of its role, BSEC has been honored with the 2021 “*Multilateral Peace Award*” of the prestigious “Goi Peace Foundation” because of its “*outstanding contributions to promoting multilateralism and fostering a culture of peace*”.

**All the above** would not have been possible without the **unwavering support** and commitment of my colleagues in the PERMIS and, of course that of all the representatives of your Ministries involved in BSEC issues. I wish to thank all from the bottom of my heart!

Yet, while the BSEC PERMIS gradually evolved into becoming the “**locomotive**” of the Organization’s activities, the performance and effectiveness of the Subsidiary Organs, i.e., the Working Groups (WGs), various Steering Committees, etc., remained stagnant.

Issues and projects of vital importance for the Member States - but also for the **prestige** of the Organization - like the *Black Sea Ring Highway* (BSRH) or the *Motorways of the Sea* (MoS) still remain in their initial phases of 13 years back. For others, like the endorsement of the draft *Trade Facilitation Strategy* (TFS) and of the *Single Window* (SW) document, there is still no consensus on how and when to place them under **your** consideration for endorsement.

The functioning of many WGs has been trapped into a vicious circle of meetings with no concrete **deliverables, leading** to the diminished **interest** and shrinking **participation** of Member States; discussions during the meetings are usually monopolized by representatives of only 2-3 Member States, a situation that continued even **with** the **online** meetings, with many participants “lost” behind background-photos on the screen.

But, **you** dear Ministers, constantly remind us of the need for **reforms** and **adaptation** to the challenges of today!

In order to better **respond** to your prompts and encouragement I firmly believe that the following factors are of paramount importance, so that we can unlock the **full potential** of the Organization:

1. Serious institutional work has to be done, in order to **adapt** BSEC’s statutory documents to the **totally different** challenges and realities of today. In the “Blue Book” as it stands today, the PERMIS is envisaged only as the **secretarial caretaker**, authorized to prepare and distribute **documents** and **reports**, as well as to **consult** with Member States and maintain dialogue with international organizations.

Yet, the PERMIS has steadily assumed many more responsibilities, becoming the actual **“locomotive”** of the Organization, in an effort to fill the gap of inactivity. **In essence, the PERMIS didn’t do anything else than to assume the role and responsibilities that Secretariats in every regional or international organization are entrusted with.**

But, even **yesterday** we heard **unfair complaints** that the Secretariat engages in projects by **“violating”** the Charter, **despite** the Secretariat’s **meticulous efforts** to inform Member States on every single move it undertakes in order to attract more funds and carry-out more projects. **Dear Ministers**, I am sure you agree that the **efficiency and effectiveness** of a regional entity **directly** depend on a **strong, competent and responsible** Secretariat.

2. As BSEC approaches its 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary in 2022 it is **imperative to engage in a serious and comprehensive evaluation** of the way it performed until now, by initiating an **authoritative “Progress Report”**; the latter’s conclusions and recommendations could decisively help in **forging** new policies and good practices and in **adapting** the old ones to the different challenges of the post-covid reality.

BSEC could entrust this **fundamental for its future project** to a prominent specialized entity like the **OECD**; the relevant cost could be covered by third partners. That was what the *Union for the Mediterranean* did recently, with the financial support of the *German Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development*.

3. After 29 years of life, it is perhaps necessary to **renew, at the highest possible level**, the **strong political commitment** to the economic cooperation among BSEC Member States and, **what is most important**, to **ensure** that the above political commitment **actually translates into effective implementation**.

4. Greater **“sense of ownership and trust”** from the Member States towards BSEC; this means **genuine involvement** in **result-oriented** discussions and activities of **mutual interest and benefit**. BSEC PERMIS has already proven that the Organization **can deliver** and that it **can be trusted** with the implementation of concrete and complex projects or initiatives.

5. The **“human factor”**: participation in the promotion of regional cooperation should function as the ground for mutual understanding and real cooperation by the involvement of **authorized and qualified participants**.

During the first decade of BSEC’s life, the CSO was mainly composed by **high-level, experienced and authorized to decide Plenipotentiaries**, given the **serious** responsibilities that this organ is entrusted with. Unfortunately, during the last years the composition of the CSO refers mainly to lower-level representatives of the respective MFAs, a fact that has **certainly** not benefitted the organization.

**Of course**, in today’s **complex and multipolar** world, with so much unpredictability and instability, **many** of the issues facing BSEC are problems afflicting other international entities as well. Yet, I believe that perhaps the ad hoc **active involvement** and **guidance** of the Ministers of Foreign Affairs could be **decisive** in **cutting some of the “Gordian knots”** that the WGs and the *Committee of Senior Officials* (CSO) have not been able to “untie” for so many years.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

The above sober thoughts cannot obfuscate the tremendous work and concrete achievements of the BSEC organization: **apart** from establishing a culture of dialogue and understanding in a difficult environment, **apart** from serving as an institutionalized platform of continuous contact among governments and state or private institutions, **apart** from implementing projects of regional importance and promoting the collective picture of its Member States, BSEC has **also served as a precious, first-level confidence-building mechanism** – not a minor feat, **indeed**, given the circumstances.

Regional Organizations like BSEC are not so much what their Member States **wish** them to be, but what they actually **help** and **allow** them **to do**. In this sense, **let us all** help and allow “our” Organization to assume and play an even more important role; **because even if the BSEC Organization did not exist in our turbulent and geostrategic neighborhood, we should have invented it.**

In conclusion allow me to state how honored and happy I am that Ambassador Lazar COMĂNESCU, a distinguished and highly respected Minister and friend will be taking over the reigns of BSEC PERMIS; I am confident that under his inspired guidance BSEC Organization will reach even higher peaks of effectiveness and success.

I wish to him and to the incoming Georgian Chairmanship all the best.

Thanks for your kind attention. –