



**PRESS RELEASE ON
THE 10TH INTERNATIONAL BLACK SEA SYMPOSIUM
"THE BLACK SEA - SILK ROAD CORRIDOR:
BUILDING BRIDGES OF COOPERATION"
(Athens, 6-7 March 2019)**

The 10th International Black Sea Symposium organized by the International Centre for Black Sea Studies (ICBSS) took place in Athens on 6-7 March 2019 with the "*Black Sea - Silk Road Corridor: Building Bridges of Cooperation*" as its main theme.

Diplomats, academicians and experts from BSEC Member States, along with distinguished representatives from Germany, Hungary, Italy and other countries took active part in the various interesting panels of the event. The BSEC PERMIS Secretary General Ambassador Michael B. CHRISTIDES and Deputy Secretary General Dr. Sergei GONCHARENKO represented the BSEC PERMIS at the above symposium.

The three sessions of the first day referred to the tourism potential of the "Silk Road" concept and to the importance of the Black Sea Region as the crossing-point between Europe and Asia. The fourth session during the second day focused on the advantages and challenges raised by the Chinese *Belt & Road Initiative*.

BSEC PERMIS Secretary General participated in the last of the above sessions with his intervention titled: "*The Belt & Road Initiative: another intra-European point of friction?*".

He elaborated on the different ways that this Chinese Initiative is being perceived in Northern Europe and Brussels, compared to the way Southeast European countries and states in the wider Black Sea Region tend to approach it. For the first, the B&RI is not well defined, there are no clear objectives, there is no due diligence on the envisaged projects and the question of the sustainability of these projects is ominously missing, thus, many states in Northern Europe view the B&RI as a Chinese "Trojan horse". On the contrary, capital-hungry South-eastern states in Europe wish to take advantage of the big funds made available by China, in order to implement urgently needed infrastructure projects. Ambassador CHRISTIDES underlined that a common voice needs to be reached, Europe should endorse a single policy towards the B&RI and, at the same time, try to influence the way it is implemented, especially by making it more transparent and by improving its bidding and procurement procedure. He further concluded, the B&RI is too important as a trade and development locomotive in the Eurasian.

Considering the various views expressed by participants concerning the implementation of the B&RI in the Black Sea region, Deputy Secretary General Dr. GONCHARENKO proposed to the ICBSS management to prepare a report on the views and stands of BSEC Member States vis-à-vis the Chinese initiative and Beijing's advance in the wider Black Sea region.

This proposal was accepted by the ICBSS Director General Mr. Georgios MITRAKOS.