



ORGANIZATION OF THE BLACK SEA ECONOMIC COOPERATION

Permanent International Secretariat

BRIEF SUMMARY OF THE COORDINATION MEETING OF THE AD HOC WORKING GROUP ON “BSEC CORONAVIRUS PROTOCOLS” IN TOURISM OF THE INTERESTED MEMBER STATES

5 March 2021, online

1. In light of the on-going consideration of a possible agreement on a common platform – framework of measures and actions for a safe and gradual recovery of Tourism activities in the BSEC region, the *BSEC Permanent International Secretariat (PERMIS)* hosted an **online** meeting of the *ad hoc Working Group on “BSEC Coronavirus Protocols” in Tourism* on **March 5, 2021**.
2. The meeting was held at the initiative of the BSEC PERMIS under the Albanian Chairmanship-in-Office and the Romanian Country – Coordination of the Working Group on Cooperation in Tourism.
3. The meeting was attended by representatives from the following BSEC Member States:
 1. Republic of Armenia
 2. Republic of Azerbaijan
 3. Republic of Bulgaria
 4. Georgia
 5. Hellenic Republic
 6. Republic of Moldova
 7. Republic of North Macedonia
 8. Romania
 9. Russian Federation
 10. Republic of Serbia
 11. Republic of Turkey
 12. Ukraine
4. A representative of the *United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO)*, a BSEC Sectoral Dialogue Partner, also participated the Meeting.
5. The List of Participants is attached as **Annex I**.
6. In his opening remarks, the **BSEC PERMIS Secretary General, Ambassador Michael B. CHRISTIDES**, called on the Member States **to urgently agree on the harmonized travel “BSEC Coronavirus Protocols”** and ensure their swift implementation, in order to provide a much-needed impetus to Travel & Tourism in the region. He emphasized

the urgency of accelerating the coordination in order to agree upon a jointly acceptable package of measures and actions, which can help the safe resumption of tourist flows among Member States. As domestic tourism and travel between neighboring countries is expected to be among the first to re-open, the importance of endorsing and introducing the above Protocols is further underlined.

7. PERMIS presented its new *BSEC Covid-19* website www.bsec-covidinfo.org, a new “live” information platform that hosts the latest updates concerning health and other regulations and measures adopted by the various Member States, in order to control the spread of the Coronavirus outbreak and aiming to provide timely and reliable information to citizens throughout the region. It is planned that the new platform will be further enriched with additional information chapters on Transport, Healthcare and Pharmaceuticals, SMEs, Trade and Economic Development, etc., as these sectors, also severely affected by the current emergency, are the main driving force of the region’s economies.

8. The representatives of PERMIS called on Member States to make full use of all the means and mechanisms offered by this unique platform, and urged them to regularly update the information concerning the relevant national measures, as well as to enrich its content by feeding the former with news covering the latest developments in their countries related to this topic. The full responsibility to regularly update and submit the necessary information lies with the Member States, a fact that was clearly underlined.

9. To this end, it has been agreed that the Member States will provide to PERMIS the soonest possible the contact details of two designated representatives: a “country poll operator” and a “country controller”, with whom the PERMIS will establish direct and immediate contact in order to explain all technical aspects of using the above platform and to hand the necessary access codes (passwords), which will allow them to log on the platform and thus enter / edit any content (information) related to Travel & Tourism in their respective country.

10. Participants commended PERMIS for its valuable and timely initiative; the widespread promotion of the new BSEC website among the general public and through various social media was also discussed. Accordingly, Member States were kindly invited to advertise the above by sharing it on their own relevant websites and social media platforms. Likewise, PERMIS will use its own public relations and media channels to further promote the above platform.

11. Under the second discussion point, a thorough exchange of views took place among all the participants, in the context of the consideration and elaboration of the joint “*BSEC Coronavirus Protocols*”, referring to an operational and health package of measures to be agreed-upon, which will enable the safe and gradual reopening of Tourism flows between the Member States.

12. In this regard, and in order to speed up the coordination initiated during the two previous meetings of this Working Group, PERMIS will liaise closely with the UNWTO to draft a brief plan setting minimum standards for the safe and gradual reopening of tourism between Member States and beyond, which will be submitted to the Member States for further consideration. In addition, PERMIS will consult with the Hellenic Republic, which has

recently announced a coordination plan for the European re-opening of Tourism, in order to explore possibilities of producing a similar plan, tailored to the Black Sea region's needs.

13. Furthermore, PERMIS reiterated its call to all the participants to be actively involved in the development and elaboration of the above plan – set of measures and parameters for re-opening of Tourism activities among the Member States and, to that end, to submit, at their earliest convenience, their relevant proposals and observations, if any, to the BSEC Secretariat.

14. The participants also discussed a draft *Joint Statement on Solidarity and Cooperation in Tourism of the BSEC Member States in the Face of the Challenges Posed by the Novel Coronavirus Pandemic* - an overall framework document to be endorsed by the Ministers responsible for Tourism, which outlines the main principles and aims of their above endeavor. The first draft of this document was prepared by PERMIS in consultation with the UNWTO. The representatives of the Hellenic Republic and the Russian Federation proposed several amendments to the text which will be incorporated into the text of the Document and sent to the Member States for further consideration, together with the proposals previously forwarded by the Republic of Armenia and Romania. The amended text of the Joint Declaration is attached as **Annex II**.

15. **Mr. Peter JANECH**, Deputy Director, Regional Depart. For Europe, UNWTO, delivered a comprehensive **presentation** entitled *“Protocols to #Restart Tourism”* (**attached as Annex III**), sharing the latest statistics, as well as trends and future prospects for the industry. According to the latest data by the UNWTO, in 2020 global tourism suffered its worst year on record, with international arrivals dropping by 74% (73, 5% in the BSEC region). Destinations worldwide welcomed 1 billion fewer international arrivals in 2020 than in the previous year, due to an unprecedented fall in demand and widespread travel restrictions.

16. Furthermore, Mr. Peter JANECH reaffirmed **UNWTO's full support in promoting the BSEC Covid-19 Cooperation Platform** and put forward some concrete proposals to that effect.

17. In “any other business” participants exchanged views on the project proposal *“Black Sea Tourism Activator 2021”*, a new BSEC PERMIS initiative for selecting the most innovative solutions and ideas of start-ups and established innovators in all 13 Member States that could help in the faster recovery of their tourism sector and could be applied across the Black Sea region.

18. The ad hoc Working Group agreed to continue and enhance its activity on the above issues, as well as to meet again whenever necessary, without setting a concrete date.