



ORGANIZATION OF THE BLACK SEA ECONOMIC COOPERATION

Permanent International Secretariat

BS/WGCT/R(2021)1

REPORT OF THE MEETING OF THE BSEC WORKING GROUP ON COOPERATION IN TOURISM

Videoconference, 23 September 2021

1. The Meeting of the BSEC Working Group on Cooperation in Tourism was held online on 23 September 2021.
2. The Meeting was chaired by Mrs. Mihaela PARTECA, Deputy Director General, Directorate General for Promoting Economy – Tourism Sector, Ministry of Economy, Business Environment and Tourism of Romania.
3. Opening remarks were made by the BSEC PERMIS Secretary General Ambassador Lazăr COMĂNESCU.
4. The Meeting was attended by the representatives of the following BSEC Member States:
 - Republic of Albania
 - Republic of Armenia
 - Republic of Azerbaijan
 - Republic of Bulgaria
 - Georgia
 - Hellenic Republic
 - Republic of Moldova
 - Romania
 - Russian Federation
 - Republic of Serbia
 - Republic of Turkey
 - Ukraine
5. The following BSEC Related Bodies attended the Meeting:
 - Parliamentary Assembly of BSEC (PABSEC)
 - International Centre for Black Sea Studies (ICBSS)
6. The following BSEC Observers attended the Meeting:
 - Arab Republic of Egypt
 - Hungary
7. The following BSEC Sectoral Dialogue Partners attended the Meeting:

United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO)
Conference of Peripheral Maritime Regions of Europe (CPMR)
Montenegro

8. The representatives of the Aristotle University of Thessaloniki, Greece, and of the Black Sea Cuisine International Transcoastal Executive Committee (BSC ITEC), attended the meeting as Guests.

9. The List of Participants is attached as **Annex I** to the present Report.

AGENDA ITEM 1: ADOPTION OF THE AGENDA

10. The Draft Agenda of the Meeting was discussed and adopted. The Agenda, as adopted, is attached as **Annex II**.

AGENDA ITEM 2: IMPLEMENTATION OF THE RESOLUTIONS, DECISIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE BSEC COUNCIL AND FOLLOW-UP OF THE DECLARATIONS AND JOINT STATEMENTS ADOPTED BY THE MINISTERS IN CHARGE OF TOURISM OF THE BSEC MEMBER STATES

11. The BSEC PERMIS informed on the implementation of the Resolutions, Decisions and Recommendations of the BSEC Council and the follow up of the Declarations and the Statements of the Ministers in charge of Tourism since the last Meeting of the Working Group (online, 5 March 2021).

12. The Member States were requested to update the list containing the coordinates of their respective focal points in charge of Tourism (attached as **Annex III**) in order to facilitate a direct communication between the BSEC PERMIS and the relevant Ministries.

AGENDA ITEM 3: PRESENTATION OF THE ACTION PLAN FOR THE PERIOD OF 1 JULY 2020 – 30 JUNE 2022 DEVELOPED BY THE MINISTRY OF ECONOMY, BUSINESS ENVIRONMENT AND TOURISM OF ROMANIA, THE CURRENT COUNTRY-COORDINATOR OF THE WORKING GROUP

13. The delegation of Romania, the current Country-Coordinator, elaborated and presented the draft *Plan of Action of the Working Group on Cooperation in Tourism* covering the period from 1 July 2020 to 30 June 2022, including the general objectives and key priorities of the Working Group, as well as the challenges and opportunities for further development of projects and initiatives within the Working Group.

14. The Working Group considered and approved the presented Plan of Action for its submission to the Committee of Senior Officials (CSO) and expressed its appreciation for the work of the delegation of Romania in the preparation of the above-mentioned document. The Action Plan, as approved by the Working Group, is attached as **Annex IV**.

AGENDA ITEM 4: EXCHANGE OF VIEWS ON POSSIBLE REGIONAL COOPERATION AND PROJECTS IN SUPPORT OF TOURISM DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC: EXPLORING OPPORTUNITIES FOR COLLABORATION AND DRAWING CONCRETE LINES OF ACTION REGARDING A NEW COOPERATION PLATFORM “BSEC CORONAVIRUS PROTOCOLS IN TOURISM” TO LIMIT THE NEGATIVE CONSEQUENCES OF THE PANDEMIC

15. Under this discussion point, the participants jointly assessed the situation of the Tourism sector in the BSEC region after the conclusion of the summer season in the context of the pandemic aftermath.

16. The representative of the UNWTO provided a comprehensive overview of the initiatives and activities carried out by the Organization during the pandemic outbreak, as well as strategies and mechanisms to support the tourism industry to “get back on its feet” and what needs to be done to prepare for the day after COVID-19. It was underlined that effective solutions require inclusive approaches at all levels, involving a coalition of many different stakeholders, for an open dialogue and result-oriented solutions for a more resilient, innovative and sustainable Tourism. In this context, the IT sector and digitalisation, the promotion of innovation and the use of innovative approaches to adapt to the new market requirements, identification of new skills and capacity-building have been identified as key priorities for the post-pandemic era. Additionally, the backing of policymakers is needed to make sure these solutions prosper on the ground. The presentation made by UNWTO is attached to the Report as **Annex V**.

17. BSEC PERMIS reiterated its appeal Member States to make full use of all the means and mechanisms offered by BSEC COVID-19 information platform (www.bsec-covidinfo.org), and to regularly update the information concerning the relevant national measures, as well as to enrich its content by providing to the former with news covering the latest developments in their countries related to this topic.

18. In addition, the participants exchanged views on the amended draft of the “*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. In this regard, based on the comments and suggestions made during the Meeting, BSEC PERMIS will prepare a revised Joint Statement that will reflect the new developments with regard to COVID-19 situation and submit it to the Member States for consideration with a view to finalize it during the next meeting of the Working Group.

19. The Working Group took note of the ideas and proposals expressed in the presentations and statements under this agenda item and, acknowledging the significance of the issue, agreed to continue and enhance its activities towards faster recovery and revitalization of Travel & Tourism in and among the BSEC Member States.

AGENDA ITEM 5: ACTIONS TAKEN OR TO BE TAKEN WITH REGARD TO THE SPECIAL INTEREST TOURISM COOPERATION AREAS:

a) Gastronomy and Wine Tourism – update regarding the Black Sea Cuisine – Development and Promotion Program

20. The representatives of the Black Sea Cuisine International Transcoastal Executive Committee presented the updates on the developments of the “*Black Sea Cuisine – Development and Promotion Program*”, whose start-up was co-funded by the Black Sea Project Promotion Facility (BSPPF). The initiators invited the interested BSEC Member States to participate in this project. The presentation is attached as **Annex VI**.

21. As a first step that might later lead to the further cooperation within the activities of the Working Group, participants were invited to establish direct contact with the project proponent or through BSEC PERMIS, for further discussion and coordination of possible joint efforts among the interested Member States.

22. In addition, the representative of the BSEC PERMIS suggested to the representatives of the above Program to participate in the VI UNWTO World Forum on Gastronomy Tourism, which will be held in a hybrid format (in Bruges, Belgium and online) on 31 October – 2 November 2021, with the aim of introducing the Project and promoting the Black Sea Cuisine brand to the wider audience.

b) Cultural Routes - Cultural Tourism Projects

23. The Working Group took note of the information provided by the BSEC PERMIS on the state of affairs regarding the latter's cooperation with the Secretariat of the *Enlarged Partial Agreement* (EPA) on Cultural Routes of the Council of Europe and called on Member States to take full advantage of the opportunities offered by the recent impressive cooperation upgrade. In addition, the BSEC PERMIS reiterated its appeal to all Member States to actively participate in already existing Cultural Routes as well as candidate Cultural Routes.

24. Furthermore, the participants emphasized the increasing relevance of Cultural Routes in a post-pandemic world, as well as their potential for the development of sustainable tourism.

25. The representative of Romania briefed on the activities undertaken by the Ministry of Economy, Business Environment and Tourism in relation to the Cultural Routes of the Council of Europe, highlighting that over 100 tourism-cultural routes have been certified so far (23 national routes, 44 regional routes, 34 local routes, and 3 transnational routes) by the Ministry, on various themes: e.g. *Cultural Tourist Route of the Wooden Churches from Romania, On the Footstep of Hercules, Romanian Museums Route, Transilvania Gate* etc. The presentation is attached as **Annex VII**. In addition, the same delegation invited the interested Member States to join the initiative.

26. The representative of the International Centre for Black Sea Studies (ICBSS) informed about the *Regional Stakeholders Webinar* entitled: “*Cultural Tourism and Digital Transformation in the BSEC Region and Beyond: Lessons learned in the context of COVID-19 Pandemic*” which will be jointly organized by the ICBSS and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Armenia on 10 November 2021. In addition, the same representative informed about the *5th BSEC Month of Culture*, to be organised online from 1 to 30 November 2021, and invited the BSEC Member States to send any relevant electronic material to be promoted during the BSEC Month of Culture.

27. The representative of the Vine & Wine Foundation of Armenia delivered a presentation on the wine tourism of Armenia entitled: “*Explore Armenia through a Glass of Wine*”. The presentation is attached as **Annex VIII**.

28. Representatives of the Republic of Bulgaria, Georgia, the Republic of Moldova and the Republic of Turkey briefed on the state of affairs regarding their cooperation with the Secretariat of the *Enlarged Partial Agreement* (EPA) on Cultural Routes of the Council of Europe and listed activities related to the EPA Cultural Routes in their countries.

29. The Working Group took note of the information delivered by the representative of the *Balkan and Black Sea Commission* (BBSC) of the *Conference of Peripheral Maritime Regions of Europe* (CPMR), concerning the latest achievements on the “*Cultural and Creative Regional Ecosystems*” (CCRE-S3), thematic area and possible areas of cooperation with BSEC.

30. Following the deliberations on the issue, the Working Group decided to continue the consideration of this item at its next meeting.

c) Silk Road Initiatives; latest updates

31. Under this agenda sub item, Prof. Stella KOSTOPOULOU provided updated information on the activities of the “*European Interdisciplinary Silk Road Tourism Centre at the Aristotle University of Thessaloniki, Greece*”, and invited interested institutions from BSEC Member States to cooperate with the Centre. In addition, the same representative briefed about the Black Sea project “*SILC - Silk Road Local Culture*” lead by the Center, with partners from Armenia, Bulgaria, Georgia and Romania. The presentation is attached as **Annex IX**.

d) Niche tourism areas: rural tourism, agro tourism and maritime, nautical and cruise tourism

32. Under this agenda sub item, the representative of the Hellenic Republic introduced the project being developed in cooperation with the UNWTO regarding the establishment of a Research and Monitoring Center for Coastal and Maritime Tourism in the Eastern Mediterranean and invited the interested Member States to contact them for further possible cooperation.

33. In addition, the Working Group took note of the information presented by the representative of the International Centre for Black Sea Studies (ICBSS) on the *BLACK SEA CRUISE – Sustainable small-scale cruising /yachting in the Black Sea*, which aims to analyze the state of play and environmental and socio-economic potential for novel small-scale cruising /yachting models in order to support, through a final set of recommendation, the sustainable development of activities in the Black Sea region. The presentation is attached as **Annex X**.

e) Film-induced Tourism

34. With reference to this agenda sub item, the representative of the Hellenic Republic briefed on the state of affairs regarding the progress of collecting relevant data on national agencies involved in attracting foreign film productions from interested Member States, in order to prepare the respective list of such entities and establish their loose network.

35. The Secretariat invited the remaining Member States to respond to the request to send their contributions on this matter as soon as possible to their Hellenic counterparts in order to prepare a concrete proposal on cooperation on Film-induced Tourism and report by the next meeting of the Working Group.

36. Following the deliberations on the issue, the Working Group decided to continue the consideration of this item at its next meeting.

AGENDA ITEM 6: EXHIBITIONS, TOURISM FAIRS AND OTHER EVENTS WITH REGARD TO ACTIVE TYPES OF TOURISM

37. Given the current situation related to the COVID-19 pandemic, the Working Group decided to defer this agenda item to the next meeting of the Working Group and to continue its consideration when circumstances allow.

AGENDA ITEM 7: PROMOTION OF INNOVATION AND ENTREPRENEURSHIP IN THE TOURISM SECTOR LEADING TO THE RE-LAUNCHING OF TOURISM ACTIVITY IN SAFE CONDITIONS FOR TOURISTS, THUS RESTORING CONFIDENCE IN TOURISM PRODUCTS/SERVICES – BSEC AWARD ON TOURISM

38. Referring to the proposal of the Working Group for the establishment of the BSEC Tourism Award, BSEC PERMIS, provided updates regarding the project proposal “*Black Sea Tourism Activator 2021*”- *BSEC Award on Tourism* for the best and most promising ideas and solutions in tourism produced by start-up companies from the BSEC Member States, a custom-tailored project proposal prepared by *the World Tourism Forum Lucerne*.

39. The Working Group took note of information presented by the representative of the International Centre for Black Sea Studies (ICBSS) about the project *CulTourE4Youth – Supporting Youth Entrepreneurship in Cultural Tourism for coastal communities in the Black Sea*, run under the coordination of ICBSS. The project aims to increase the knowledge and entrepreneurial culture of young people and to promote sustainable coastal tourism practices in the geographical area of the Republic of Azerbaijan, Georgia, Republic of Moldova, Republic of Turkey and Ukraine. In addition, the same representative invited the eligible Member States to join the project. The presentation is attached as **Annex XI**.

40. Following the deliberations on the issue, the Working Group decided to continue the consideration of this item at its next meeting.

AGENDA ITEM 8: ANY OTHER BUSINESS

41. The representative of the Russian Federation informed about the plans for holding a Meeting of the BSEC Ministers in charge of Tourism during their Chairmanship (October 2022, Sochi).

AGENDA ITEM 9: ADOPTION OF THE REPORT OF THE MEETING

42. The Working Group on Cooperation in Tourism adopted the present Report for its submission to the next Meeting of the BSEC Committee of Senior Officials.