

News from the Black Sea

Organization of the Black Sea Economic Cooperation

Permanent International Secretariat (PERMIS)



Meeting with the Minister of Culture and Tourism of the Republic of Turkey, H.E. Mr. Mehmet Nuri Ersoy

Preparations for the organization of an International Conference on Cruise Tourism in the Black Sea and the Eastern Mediterranean, to be held in Istanbul in 2019, as a joint endeavour of the UNWTO, the Turkish Ministry of Culture and Tourism and the BSEC PERMIS.

The BSEC PERMIS Secretary General, Ambassador Michael B. Christides was received on 22 October 2018 by the Minister of Culture and Tourism of the Republic of Turkey, H.E. Mr. Mehmet Nuri Ersoy.

Ambassador Christides informed his high interlocutor on the ongoing preparations for the organization of an International Conference on attracting Cruise Tourism in the Black Sea and the Eastern Mediterranean, to be held in Istanbul in 2019. As an expert in Cruise Tourism, H.E. Minister Ersoy gave his valuable input for the success of this initiative and reiterated the full commitment of the Turkish Ministry for preparing and organizing the Conference in the best possible way.

Ambassador Christides also updated the Minister on the latest developments concerning cooperation among BSEC Member States in the fields of Tourism and Culture and exchanged views on issues on which the involvement of the Turkish Ministry is of paramount importance; even more so, since Turkey assumed the coordinator-ship of the BSEC *Working Group on Cooperation in Tourism* for the period from 1 July 2018 to 30 June 2020.



MEETING OF THE MINISTERS IN CHARGE OF TRANSPORT OF THE BSEC MEMBER STATES

(Baku, 25 October 2018)

"Boosting Trade through Connectivity" is the slogan of the Azerbaijani BSEC Chairmanship-in-Office, which perfectly reflects the efforts of BSEC Member States to further improve their cooperation in this field.

The above Meeting was chaired by H.E. Mr. Ramin Guluzade, Minister of Transport, Communications & High Technologies of the Republic of Azerbaijan and was attended by representatives from the BSEC Member States, Related Bodies, Observers, Sectoral Dialogue Partners and international organizations.

Heads of Delegations of the BSEC Member States delivered their statements on the current situation concerning transports in the Black Sea region and on the efforts required for its further improvement.

The PERMIS Secretary General Ambassador Christides reiterated that BSEC, as a regional organization promoting economic co-operation among its Member States, attaches great importance to the improvement of the overall connectivity between them.

While mentioning the BSEC projects on the *Black Sea Ring Highway* and the *Motorways of the Sea* as complementary to other greater projects covering the Euro-Asian region, Ambassador Christides also underlined the *existing physical and non-physical barriers* which still threaten trade and transports in the BSEC Region, stressing that Member States should try to address them in a coordinated way.

The Ministerial meeting was preceded by that of the relevant Working Group, during which many decisions on important issues were agreed and placed under the endorsement of the responsible Ministers.



MEETING OF THE MINISTERS IN CHARGE OF CULTURE OF THE BSEC MEMBER STATES

(Belgrade, 23 November 2018)

“Cultural diplomacy, a tool for a better world - (Re)shaping cultural diplomacy for a stable and secure World in the Black Sea Region”.

That was the main theme of the last Ministerial Meeting on Culture hosted in Belgrade on 23 November 2018 by the Ministry of Culture and Media of the Republic of Serbia.

The Ministers and heads of delegations adopted *“The Belgrade Declaration of the Ministers in charge of Culture of the Member States of the Organization of the Black Sea Economic Cooperation”* in which they reaffirmed their commitment to strengthen cultural cooperation among BSEC Member States and to continue promoting the model of cultural cooperation based on mutual understanding and respect; they acknowledged cultural diplomacy as an important “soft power” tool that builds bridges among peoples and cultural exchanges as an instrument for addressing challenges of globalization, promoting respect for cultural diversity and fostering mutual understanding. They also underlined the importance of following new trends in international culture relations which pave ways for novel partnerships and strengthen the cooperation with the BSEC Related Bodies and various other entities. Stressing the importance of joint projects in the field of culture in the BSEC Region, the Member States’ Ministers recognized cultural heritage as an important resource of the region and encouraged creativity and greater mobility of artists; finally, they agreed that mutual understanding is better served through the promotion of linguistic diversity and local literature.



The revival of historic and cultural routes is on the international Tourism agenda!

Most participants of the “2nd International Congress on World Civilizations and Historic Routes” which was held in Sofia on 15-16 November 2018, co-organized by the Ministry of Tourism of the Republic of Bulgaria and the UNWTO, agreed that similar routes help reveal the unique history, culture and natural assets of regions and countries.

Participants to the event underlined the importance of the sustainable promotion and presentation of the cultural heritage of countries and regions, in order to adopt and enhance best practices in tourism development. In his brief interventions at the High Level Meeting, Ambassador Christides informed the audience on the multifaceted activities of the BSEC Working Groups on Culture and on Tourism and underlined that in the broader region of the Black Sea many and significant Civilizations were established and flourished. The cultural and historic heritage of the region is unique and the effort of the BSEC Organization is how to best preserve and present it.

On the side-lines of the Congress Ambassador Christides held brief bilateral meetings with many of the participants, including the new Deputy Secretary General of the UNWTO, Ministers and Deputy Ministers of various countries as well as with the well-known extreme athlete and activist Mr. Kai MARKUS (founder of the “Run my Silk Road” initiative).

Ambassador Christides was also received by the Minister of Tourism of Bulgaria, H.E. Mrs. Nikolina ANGELKOVA, whom he informed in detail on the results of the last meeting of the BSEC Working Group on Tourism, on the implementation of ongoing initiatives and on the planned activities for the near future. Minister ANGELKOVA repeated her strong interest and steadfast support to PERMIS for the realization of all projects and plans, expressing her particular interest for promoting the gastronomic heritage of the Black Sea region.



“Cooperation, coordination, synergies...” was the most important common denominator in the interventions of all speakers participating at the Ministerial Roundtable during the ***“8th UNWTO International Meeting on Silk Road Tourism”***, held in Thessaloniki, Greece, on 10-12 October 2018, organized by the UNWTO, the Ministry of Tourism and the Region of Central Macedonia of the Hellenic Republic.

Speakers emphasized the need to enhance cooperation among the Silk Road Member States and, with the involvement of public-private partnerships, come up with new thematic tourism products, new destinations and investment opportunities. The BSEC PERMIS Secretary General, Ambassador Christides, underlined that the BSEC Organization constitutes a useful and trusted vehicle for achieving the above lofty aims of cooperation. He also presented the multifaceted activities of BSEC in the field of Tourism and invited interested stakeholders to take advantage of the mechanisms that the Organization already possesses, as well as of its long experience when considering projects related to Silk Road Tourism. He also stressed the geostrategic character of the wider Black Sea region, as the natural bridge between three continents, Asia, Europe and Africa.



“Monitoring Internet Media in the Digital Age”

This was the subject of the “*9th Annual Meeting of the Broadcasting Regulatory Authorities Forum (BRAf)*” (Bucharest, 3-4 October 2018), during which BSEC PERMIS was represented by its Secretary General, Ambassador Michael B. Christides.

The Meeting brought together the representatives of the Broadcasting Regulatory authorities from BSEC Member States with the aim to exchange views and experiences in their field of action, to promote, wherever possible, common standards and to establish closer cooperation and synergies among BSEC Member States.

During his intervention, Ambassador Christides emphasized the fact that the BSEC Organization suffers from lack of publicity even in its Member States, thus, the support of BRAf in the efforts to rectify this situation can be of vital importance.

After generally informing the audience on the activities of the BSEC Organization and especially on the work of the BSEC Working Group on ICT, Ambassador Christides briefed participants on the Project titled “*Development of a Business Plan for a Single Information Space (SIS) in the BSEC area - Golden Fleece*”, initiated by a Russian Company and partially financed by the BSEC “*Black Sea Project Promotion Facility*”. He described the main objective of the project, which concerns the formulation of a business plan (model) for two interrelated resources, a Joint TV Network and an Information Portal, with outreach to all BSEC Member States and encouraged the Broadcasting Regulatory authorities from BSEC Member States to render their support for the successful implementation of the project.





3rd GREEN ENERGY INVESTMENTS FORUM

(Athens, 10 October 2018)

BSEC PERMIS aims to be present in all fora which encourage interaction between (a) governmental officials responsible for the promotion of Green Energy and (b) representatives

of the banking sector, the business communities and of NGOs active in the area of Green Energy in the wider Black Sea Region.

Thus, Ambassador Traian Chebeleu, Deputy Secretary General of the BSEC PERMIS, took part in the above Conference organized by the *Energy Policy and Development Centre* (KEPA) of the *National and Kapodistrian University* of Athens.

During the Conference, presentations were made by representatives of local government authorities, of the banking and business sector dealing with Green Energy and of the scientific community; they all highlighted the great potential for further developing regional cooperation in Green Energy in the BSEC Region, by sharing innovative experiences at local and national levels in various BSEC Member States, taking advantage of the possibilities of communication and of the professional expertise made available by the *BSEC Green Energy Network*, which is managed by KEPA, under the supervision of PERMIS.

Promoting the Black Sea as a cruise destination

The “MedCruise Association” launched its “Black Sea Working Group” during a meeting held in Odessa, Ukraine, on 17 October 2018. MedCruise, the leading association of cruise ports in the Mediterranean and Black Sea, established its *Black Sea Working Group* in order to consider ways and means for attracting large cruise vessels back to the Black Sea. Upon the invitation of the organizers, Ambassador Bratislav Dordevic, Executive Manager, re-presented the BSEC PERMIS at the event.

During the Meeting, the representatives of the Ports of Odessa, Varna and Burgas as well as a number of companies involved in the cruise industry in the Black Sea, delivered their presentations on the problems of cruise tourism in the Black Sea. The main focus was on the examination of ways and means for creating a joint approach and marketing strategy for the “outside” world and, especially, cruise companies, in order to attract big cruise vessels back to the Black Sea.



Mr. Airam D. Pastor, President of MedCruise, stated that the launching of the Working Group will have a positive impact at the cruise industry in the whole region and it will bring new opportunities to all MedCruise members from the Black Sea –Port of Odessa, Port of Varna, Port of Constanta, Port of Burgas, Port of Trabzon and Port of Istanbul- as well as the cruise-industry-related-companies that operate in the region.

Ambassador Dordevic informed on the BSEC PERMIS initiative to organize an International Conference on Cruise Tourism in the Black Sea (Istanbul, 2019-TBC), organized jointly by the Ministry of Culture and Tourism of the Republic of Turkey, the UNWTO and BSEC PERMIS.

*Transport in space is very likely to happen in the near future!
Yet, before that, let us tackle the urgent problems of today's road
transporters!*



The World Congress of the International Road Transport Union (IRU), co-hosted by the Ministry of Transport and Communications of Oman in Muscat on 6-8 November 2018, welcomed Transport Ministers, heads of intergovernmental organizations, industry leaders and important business figures from the Middle East and the world. Apart from focusing on the most important developments in the crucial sector of road transports, which are becoming increasingly digital, connected and automated, the aim of the Congress was to underline that **better mobility is crucial to achieving the UN Sustainable Development Goals, to boost trade, create jobs and to ensure the safety of communities.**

The BSEC PERMIS Secretary General, Ambassador Michael B. Christides was invited to participate in the closed-door session of the Congress that brought together Ministers and government representatives with industry leaders, in order to hear the latter's voice on the rapid development taking place in the sector; he was also invited to actively participate in the "Inclusive ministerial dialogue" session, which brought together ministerial and intergovernmental leaders in order to discuss a new blueprint for private-public cooperation in road transport, covering four main areas: trade facilitation, human capital, environment and innovation.

In his brief address the PERMIS Secretary General informed participants on the great importance that BSEC and its Member States attach to cooperating in the extremely significant sector of road transports and described the Organization's achievements up to this day.

During the above sessions many significant views were expressed, which were summarized and found reflection in the document titled "*The Muscat Compact*", endorsed by the Ministers present, as a base upon which the transport industry can effectively cooperate and coordinate with the Governments.

The most compelling conclusion reached during the session was that Governments should work closer together with the transport industry, in order to be able not only to follow innovation and progress in technology, but also to legislate correctly and timely, especially in what concerns multi-modal transports, to which, as it was argued, we would very soon include also transports in space.

1ST WORKSHOP FOR YOUNG DIPLOMATS FROM THE BSEC MEMBER STATES

BSEC PERMIS offered the chance to young diplomats from BSEC States to meet, mingle and discuss issues relevant to the Black Sea region.

The future foreign policy decision-makers came together during the “*1st Workshop for Young Diplomats from the BSEC Member States*” on “*Regional Policies in the wider Black Sea area*”, jointly organized by BSEC PERMIS and the Konrad-Adenauer-Foundation, Turkey (KAS), held on 22th - 24th October 2018 in Istanbul.

Eminent personalities from the region and beyond as well as representatives from BSEC PERMIS and KAS were among the speakers at the Workshop.

In their welcoming speeches the PERMIS Secretary General, Ambassador M.B. Christides

and Mr. Sven-Joachim Irmer, Director of KAS, underlined the importance of similar events, which constitute a precious “investment” for the future and stated that the organizers of the Workshop aspire to establish it as a valuable vehicle promoting the spirit of friendship and good neighborliness between the BSEC Member States, thus contributing to the enhancement of mutual respect and confidence, of dialogue and cooperation.

The success of the event was made evident by almost all of the 19 young diplomats that took part at the Workshop, who spoke enthusiastically about the benefit they gained from the event, proposing fervently that it should be institutionalized and, if possible, organized on an annual basis.





The traditional informal meeting of BSEC Organization with the COEST Working Party of the EU Council of Ministers (*The Working Party on Eastern Europe and Central Asia*) was held in Brussels, on 20 November 2018.

The highlights of the Meeting included (a) the presentation of the priorities of the Azerbaijan BSEC Chairmanship-in-Office, by Mr. Novruz, (b) the presentation of the BSEC PERMIS activities, by Ambassador Christides, (c) the EU contribution to the cooperation in the Black Sea region, by the various representatives of the *European Commission* and the EEAS and (d) a thorough exchange of views and proposals on how to improve the working relationship between the two entities by almost all participants.

The Chairmanship-in-Office pointed out the importance it attaches in enlarging the scope of synergies between BSEC and the EU and proposed putting more funds at the disposal of the former in order to facilitate the implementation of a greater number of projects.

Ambassador Christides described the qualitative upgrading of the relationship between the two entities by enumerating various examples of their cooperation on concrete projects and underlined the unique added value of BSEC's existence so far, that is, the establishment of a culture for dialogue and understanding in a region that even today faces serious issues of stability and security.

Representatives from the various DGs of the *European Commission* and from the EEAS presented a number of projects that are either under implementation with the participation of some BSEC Member States, or are to be implemented in the near future, with the potential – and desired – involvement of the latter.

Most of the participants reiterated the significance they attach to this annual meeting, which provides a valuable framework for the exchange of views and proposals on the promotion of the BSEC - EU interaction in a practical and mutually agreeable way. They all concurred that this interaction has attained a level which has to be preserved and further enhanced, as a concrete contribution to peace, stability and prosperity in the Black Sea region.



The space of action for NGOs has dwindled dangerously!

The **Black Sea NGO Forum**, which unites more than 1000 participants from 11 countries among which 10 are BSEC Member States, held its 11th edition on 12-14 November 2018 in Brussels; the event was organized by the Romanian NGDO Platform - FOND, in partnership with the Romanian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and with the financial support of the European Commission.

The first session of the meeting was dedicated to the stories of 5 NGOs from different Member States, the representatives of which portrayed the history, development and action of each entity, while also describing the issues and problems they are called to address in an environment that isn't as open and positive as in the past.

Thus, it was underlined that today the space of action for NGOs has dwindled dangerously and that the rising wave of nationalism and populism in many countries makes it imperative for NGOs to seek and establish a closer relationship with the general public, in order to present themselves and their activities in the right way; it was also stressed that funding has become more difficult to come around.

During his statement, the PERMIS Secretary

General stated that NGOs seem to be going through a painful transition phase: from the "romantic" period of voluntarism in social activity for the benefit of the most vulnerable parts of our societies, with no questions on the NGO's aims or integrity, we are now witnessing the passage into a period where NGOs have, internally, to acquire the necessary strength and capacity (expertise) to act and, externally, to "fight" their way for attracting funds and performing their activities, in an environment that, if not outright hostile, is posing many pressing questions and more barriers.

Ambassador Christides also participated in the Formal Opening Session of the Forum, titled "*The Black Sea Synergy – the Power of Regional Cooperation*". During the said Session, he stressed that BSEC and its Member States attach great importance in the involvement of civil organizations for addressing pressing issues confronted by our societies. He appealed to the numerous representatives of NGOs present at the Forum to come forward themselves with concrete proposals of cooperation with the BSEC Organization, which PERMIS will study with utmost interest and try to implement.

VISIT OF REPRESENTATIVES FROM THE “SILK ROAD CHAMBER OF INTERNATIONAL COMMERCE” (SRCIC)

PERMIS colleagues received on 23 November 2018 Ms. Emma Wei, Dep. Director of the Membership Centre and Mr. David Kiang, President of the Silk Road Intern. Development Fund of SRCIC, with whom they exchanged views on the establishment of cooperation relations between BSEC and the SRCIC and on expanding this cooperation by the inclusion of the *BSEC Business Council* and its interested members.

Among the possible joint initiatives discussed was the organization of a *Get to Know Each Other* event, with the purpose of jointly introducing BSEC and SRCIC and their respective activities/priorities for the promotion of regional and international cooperation. The event will offer the possibility for a wide exchange of views and networking among interested representatives of Industry & Trade Chambers, of Business Associations and of private companies from both, BSEC Member States and from China.

Both sides agreed to continue consultations with a view to identifying common activities of mutual interest, which will be brought to the attention of the Member States.



FORTHCOMING EVENTS:

The 39th Meeting of the Council of Ministers of Foreign Affairs will be held in Baku on 14 December 2018. The Republic of Azerbaijan will hand over the Chairmanship of the BSEC Organization to the Republic of Bulgaria for the first semester of the year 2019.



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