

News from the Black Sea

Organization of the Black Sea Economic Cooperation

Permanent International Secretariat (PERMIS)



"Black Sea – Silk Road Corridor: Building Bridges of Cooperation"

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 above main theme.

The tourism potential of the "Silk Road" concept and the importance of the Black Sea Region as the crossing-point between Europe and Asia were thoroughly discussed among diplomats, academics and experts from BSEC Member States, along with distinguished representatives of other countries.

Advantages and challenges raised by the Chinese *Belt & Road Initiative* were other important subjects discussed during the Symposium.

The BSEC PERMIS Secretary General, Ambassador Michael B. Christides, who attended the Symposium accompanied by the BSEC PERMIS Deputy Secretary General, Dr. Sergei Goncharenko, made an 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 among North-European States and the EU HQs in Brussels, compared to the approach of Southeast European countries and states in the wider Black Sea Region. Ambassador Christides underlined that, as the B&R Initiative is an important development "locomotive" in the Euro-Asian region, it is desirable that Europe endorses a single policy towards this initiative.



BSEC hosted three Seminars on Blue Growth in Istanbul:

1. *8th Meeting for Developing a Blue Growth Initiative for Research and Innovation in the Black Sea:* organized and chaired by the *European Commission* (DG RTD) on 18 March 2019, with the participation of experts and academics from all Black Sea littoral States plus Moldova, as well as officials from the Ministries of Foreign Affairs from other interested BSEC Member States. The expert group worked on the finalization of the *Strategic Research and Innovation Agenda* (SRIA) for the Black Sea, to be officially launched in May (8-9 May) in Bucharest by the Romanian Presidency of the Council of the European Union as a programming tool for future actions related to research and innovation in the region.



2. [Regional Stakeholder Seminar on Blue Economy](#) titled *“Towards a Common Maritime Agenda for the Black Sea”*: organized by the *European Commission’s “Facility for Blue Growth in the Black Sea”* with the support of the BSEC PERMIS on 19 March 2019, with the aim to compile views from the relevant stakeholders on the thematic content of the Common Maritime Agenda. Almost 200 participants from the public and private sectors took active part in the many structured workshops that took place during the day, thus demonstrating the keen interest of all to contribute to the beneficial objectives of this important initiative. Conclusions that can serve as a springboard for the promotion of the Common Maritime Agenda and the overall Blue Economy in the wider Black Sea region were elaborated at the end of the Meeting. In his intervention, the PERMIS Secretary General, Ambassador M.B. Christides, underlined that the *“Blue Growth”* Initiative serves as a dynamic package for the promotion of sustainable development in the wider Black Sea region.



3. [The 6th Meeting of the Steering Group of the “Facility for Blue Growth in the Black Sea”](#): organized and chaired by the *European Commission* (DG MARE) on 20 March 2019, to which representatives from all Black Sea littoral States, Moldova and some non-littoral BSEC Member States actively participated. The Steering Group continued working on the finalization of the text of the draft *“Common Maritime Agenda for the Black Sea”* (CMA for the Black Sea) which is foreseen to be agreed upon and endorsed by the relevant BSEC Ministers at the high level meeting in Bucharest on 21 May 2019.



The Winter School on Diplomacy - a networking opportunity for young diplomats to interact with their counterparts from other countries.

Each year since 2006, the *Bulgarian Diplomatic Institute* in cooperation with the *Hans Seidel Foundation* organizes in the Bulgarian town of Sandanski the *Winter School on Diplomacy*. This year's 14th edition was held on 18-22 March 2019, with the participation of 22 young diplomats from the Balkans, the Black Sea region countries and from EU Member States.

Presentations were delivered by various distinguished speakers, among them the former Minister of Foreign Affairs of Bulgaria, H.E. Mr. Solomon Passy. The BSEC PERMIS Secretary General, Ambassador Michael B. Christides participated as a key speaker and informed the young diplomats on the history, the legal basis, the functioning and on the current and future activities of the BSEC Organization, as well as on BSEC's relations with other regional and international organizations.

Question-and-answer sessions were held after every presentation, thus giving to the young participants the opportunity to build their analytical and presentation skills in an interactive learning environment.



BSEC special stand at the Third Regional Forum on Sustainable Development for the UNECE Region (Geneva, 21-22 March 2019).

This year BSEC PERMIS was, for the first time ever, present in the above important Forum also with a special stand, where information material regarding the activities of the BSEC Organization for the promotion of the UN SDGs was placed at the disposal of visitors and participants. BSEC PERMIS was represented at the Forum by Ambassador Traian Chebeleu, Deputy Secretary General.

Stakeholders from governments, civil society, academia and the private sector met at the event to create regional space for sharing policy solutions, best practices and challenges in the implementation of the UN

Sustainable Development Goals, in particular the *Climate Action*, and for identifying major regional and sub-regional trends and further actions required for achieving the objectives of the UN 2030 Agenda.



PANEL ON TRADE AND INVESTMENT RELATIONS: TURKEY, THE EU AND THE WIDER NEIGHBOURHOOD"

(Istanbul, 22 March 2019)

The Main topics of the Panel organized by the **Economic Development Foundation (IKV)** with the cooperation of the **European Commission** were the trade and investment situation and potential in the Black Sea region and in Asia.

PERMIS First Deputy Secretary-General, Ambassador Selim Yenel gave information on BSEC as well as its projects and explained how intra region trade was below potential, especially in the agricultural sector and added that more investment was needed.

The development of the ICT sector is under pressure due to the shortage of qualified people, especially women.

During the Workshop on “*Women in ICT*” organized in Sofia on 22 March 2019, by the Ministry of Transport, Information Technology and Communications of the Republic of Bulgaria, it was underlined that women could increase the diversity of ideas and experiences in the field of ICT.

Considering that ICT is an increasingly important sector of the economies in the BSEC Member States, which has grown impressively in the recent decades, it was further agreed that the gender salary gap should also be narrowed by raising the number of women in the better-paid jobs of the sector.

During the Workshop, Mr. Alexei Nistean, BSEC PERMIS Executive Manager responsible for ICT, highlighted the special importance the BSEC Organization attaches to the promotion of joint activities in the field of ICT in the Black Sea region. He made reference to *the BSEC Economic Agenda* which, in particular, sets the *Sustainable information society with advanced Information and Communication Technology infrastructure* among the seventeen goals in the priority areas of action of the Organization.

Public Discussion on the Current Challenges and Developments in the Black Sea Region. The 10-Year-Old Eastern Partnership at a Crossroads.

Ambassador Michael B. Christides, Secretary General of BSEC PERMIS was invited to make an opening statement at the above event held in Athens, on 1 April 2019, organized by the *Romanian Presidency of the Council of the European Union and the Representation of the European Commission in Greece*.

Prominent personalities such as Professor Dr. Dan Dungaciu, President of the *Black Sea University Foundation* and Professor Ioan Ioakimides from the *National and Kapodistrian University of Athens*, illuminated the current situation in the wider Black Sea region and spoke on the prospects of enhancing the stability and security in this vital part of Europe.

In his statement, Ambassador Christides described the parallel existence and functioning of the BSEC Organization and its contribution to the establishment and maintenance of a culture of dialogue and understanding, despite the recent difficulties and tension characterizing the region, through its meaningful and multifaceted efforts to promote the economic cooperation among its Member States.

Time to focus on the waste we lightheartedly discharge into our seas!

BSEC PERMIS and the *International Centre for Black Sea Studies* (ICBSS) co-organised in Sofia on 4 April 2019, the **International High-level Conference on “Inter-basin Cooperation on Marine Litter: a focus on the Danube River and the Black Sea”**, within the framework of the Bulgarian BSEC Chairmanship-in-Office and with the financial support of the *Ministry of Environment and Water* of the Republic of Bulgaria, the *European Commission*, the *Parliamentary Assembly of the Black Sea Economic Cooperation* (PABSEC) and of the *Central European Initiative* (CEI) Cooperation Fund.

The main objective of the event was to assess the challenge of marine litter, as well as to facilitate discussions and the exchange of relevant knowledge and good practices, focusing mainly on the Danube River and the Black Sea basin.

Ministers as well as representatives of international organizations dealing with environmental issues addressed the numerous participants, stressing the need for coordinated and targeted actions in tackling efficiently marine litter and underlining recent activities undertaken by their respective institutes.

BSEC PERMIS Secretary General, Ambassador Michael B. Christides, welcomed all dignitaries and participants to the event, stressing that the time to act – and act fast – has already arrived, as we are close to provoke irreparable damage to the ecosystem of the region; he stressed that it is the responsibility of all to coordinate their urgently needed efforts for addressing a situation which also gravely imperils the wellbeing of individuals and the economies of States. Ambassador Selim Yenel, First Deputy Secretary General of BSEC PERMIS compiled the important conclusions of this event, which were placed at the disposal of all BSEC Member States.



The 15th edition of the “South-East European Conference and Exhibitions on Energy Efficiency and Renewable Energy, Smart Cities, Waste Management and Recycling”.

(Sofia, 16-18 April 2019)



We want to leave to the future generations a world habitable by all.

For the first time a BSEC stand was also present in one of the halls hosting the event organized by *Via Expo Ltd.*, in partnership with the *Permanent International Secretariat (PERMIS)* of the *Black Sea Economic Cooperation Organization (BSEC)*, in order to provide information material and data on BSEC activities in the area of Green Energy.

Deputy Secretary General, Ambassador Traian Chebeleu, who represented the BSEC PERMIS, addressed the audience informing about the BSEC activities in the field of green energy and the potential of the Organization to contribute to the enhancement of regional cooperation in this vital field.

Within the framework of the above event, BSEC PERMIS also organized together with the *Energy Policy and Development Center (KEPA)* of the *National and Kapodistrian University* of Athens and with the support of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Bulgaria, the “*BSEC Green Energy Investment Forum*”.

Representatives of government authorities, the academic sector and of the Bulgarian business community presented national projects on the development of Green Energy, open to domestic and/or foreign investments. Representatives of the *European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD)* and of the *European Investment Bank (EIB)* Group presented information on Green Energy financial opportunities, the available “green” financing instruments and green economy financing facilities. The presentations were followed by an open exchange of views and lively discussions.



BUA 2019 CONFERENCE

BUA 2019 Conference – 5th Meeting of the Balkan Universities Association



“Regional Organizations are precious vehicles for promoting the implementation of the UN Sustainable Development Goals...”

These were the words of the Secretary General of the BSEC PERMIS, Ambassador Michael B. Christides, who delivered a keynote speech at the 5th Annual Conference of the Balkan Universities Association (BUA), hosted on 16-18 April 2019 in Thessaloniki by the Aristotle University under the main theme: the *“UN 2030 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in the Balkan Region: the role of the Universities”*.

The Conference was animated by the active participation of many rectors and professors from various Universities in Balkan and other States and, also, with a live video-conference with **Professor Jeffrey Sachs**, Director of the **UN Sustainable Development Solutions Network**, under the auspices of UN Secretary General António Guterres. Some of the General Policy Implications suggested by Professor Sachs were:

- Long-Term Planning and SDG Expertise
- Enhanced Public Investments in Education and R&D

- Decarbonization of the Energy System in South-East Europe
- Protection of the Mediterranean and Black Sea Ecosystems
- Regional Integration and Solidarity
- The Overriding Need for Peace with Diversity

During his speech Ambassador Christides described the relevant efforts of the BSEC Organization, especially on how the UN SDGs have been integrated into the agendas of various Working Groups of the Organization and are tightly connected to the pursued deliverables by the latter. He also referred to the *“SDSN Black Sea”* hub hosted by the Aristotle University of Thessaloniki, as well as to the recently added new hub, the *“SDSN Caspian Sea”* established in Baku, Azerbaijan.

He concluded by proposing the elaboration of a roadmap for establishing and coordinating the cooperation between (a) the higher Academic Institutions and (b) the Governments of the BSEC Member States, in order to greatly facilitate the timely and decisive implementation of the UN 2030 SDGs in the Black Sea Region.

SOME TOPICS COMING UP IN THE NEXT ISSUE:

- “5th edition of the World Forum for Intercultural Dialogue” (*Baku, 2 - 3 May 2019*)
- Meeting on “Connecting Cultures - Shaping a Creative Future for Georgia and Europe” (*Tbilisi, 6 May 2019*)
- Conference on “Sustainable Development at the Black Sea” (*Bucharest, 8-9 May 2019*)
- “World Tourism Forum Lucerne 2019” (*Lucerne, 2-4 May 2019*)



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