

News from the Black Sea

Organization of the Black Sea Economic Cooperation

Permanent International Secretariat (PERMIS)



Dear Readers,

I hope you had the opportunity to spend a safe and serene holiday season with your beloved and are ready to welcome and savor the New Year with more positive vibes.

The year 2020 has been an unusually chaotic one for the entire globe and most probably will remain as a milestone marking the beginning of a new era for mankind: the time to change and adapt to the “new normal” is here and as Socrates says: “the secret of change is to focus all of your energy not on fighting the old, but on building the new”.

Dear Friends, this 14th issue of the “News from the Black Sea” covers major events that affected or influenced our BSEC family during the last two months of the year 2020. We hope it can give you a glimpse of what happened in our region.

I wish to seize the opportunity and thank the Romanian Chairmanship-in-Office of BSEC for its support, guidance and effective chairing of the Organization during the difficult and demanding times of the whole year 2020. Also, I wish to congratulate and welcome the new, 13th Member State of the BSEC Organization, the Republic of North Macedonia, which officially joined the family from November 2020.

Wishing you a happy, healthy and prosperous New Year,

Ambassador Michael B. Christides
BSEC PERMIS Secretary General

#wear your mask #keep your social distance #wash your hands and #stay safe!

Major News

42nd Council of BSEC Ministers of Foreign Affairs

The 42nd Meeting of the Council of Ministers of Foreign Affairs (CMFA) of the Organization of the Black Sea Economic Cooperation (BSEC) was hosted by the Romanian Chairmanship in Office, online, on 27 November 2020. This was the first time ever that the Council of Ministers of Foreign Affairs has been held in a virtual format.

The Ministers acknowledged the progress achieved during the Romanian Chairmanship which has lasted twelve months instead of six, because of the global Covid-19 pandemic. They expressed their gratitude to Romania for its efforts in carrying out its responsibilities under these extraordinary circumstances and underlined the importance of developing regional economic cooperation in the wider Black Sea area even further.

The Ministers also extended a warm welcome to the newest Member State of the BSEC Organization, the Republic of North Macedonia, who attended the Council Meeting for the first time.

The CMFA adopted Resolutions, Decisions and Recommendations on various issues, including the Budget for 2021; the renewal of the Observer status of the Republic of Austria, Arab Republic of Egypt, Czech Republic, Hungary, Republic of Poland; the renewal of the Sectoral Dialogue Partnership status of Japan, Republic of Korea, Montenegro, Republic of Slovenia, the Black Sea International Shipowners Association (BINSAs), the Black Sea Region Association of Shipbuilders and Shiprepairers (BRASS), and the Black Sea Universities Network (BSUN); as well as resolutions on the level of Member States' cooperation in various sectoral areas.





The BSEC Organization is expanding!

The BSEC PERMIS is honoured to announce that the Republic of North Macedonia has completed its domestic procedures on ratifying the BSEC Charter and fulfilled all the requirements to now accede to the BSEC Organization as its 13th Member State (9 November 2020).

This is a historic moment in the BSEC Organization's 28 years of existence. BSEC PERMIS welcomes the Republic of North Macedonia to its community of States in the wider Black Sea region. We believe that by joining BSEC as a fully-fledged member and, by extending the Organization's space in Southern Europe, it will also give a fresh impetus to improved cooperation between countries in the region during the current challenging period.

Consultations with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the new BSEC Member, the Republic of North Macedonia (18 November 2020)

The aim of this first formal contact was to assist the new member in the smooth initiation of their membership and in assuming swift and effective participation in all BSEC's Governing Bodies.

The consultations provided the opportunity for the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of North Macedonia to become better acquainted with the structure, functions, procedures and Statutory Documents of the BSEC Organization, particularly in view of the number of important BSEC meetings to be held in the coming weeks and months.





First Grant to BSEC from the EU!

The PERMIS is pleased to announce that a Grant Contract was recently signed with the DG NEAR/European Commission marking the first ever direct grant from the European Union to the BSEC PERMIS!

The main projects to be funded by the grant cover several vital areas of cooperation in the region: tourism (Sustainable Small-Scale Cruising/Yachting in the Black Sea); environmental protection (Pilot Activities on Fighting Micro Plastics and Marine Litter in the Black Sea); and youth entrepreneurship (Supporting Youth Entrepreneurship in Cultural Tourism for coastal communities in the Black Sea Region).

BSEC PERMIS hopes to be able to attract more grants in the future from third parties in order to enhance the developing project-centred focus of the BSEC Organization!

Latest updates on BSEC Areas of Cooperation

Emergency Assistance

The meeting of the Working Group on Cooperation in Emergency Assistance was held online on 27 October of 2020.

It was decided to merge the Ad Hoc Working Group on Massive Forest Fires and the Ad Hoc Working Group on Floods and Torrents into one group - the Working Group on Cooperation in Emergency Assistance.

The Working Group considered the Evaluation Report presented by the previous Country-Coordinator of the Working Group (1 July 2019-30 June 2020) and adopted the Plan of Action submitted by the current Country-Coordinator for the period of 1 July 2020 - 30 June 2021.

The delegates from Member States proposed the organization of a Joint Meeting of the Working Group on Cooperation in Emergency Assistance and the Working Group on Healthcare and Pharmaceuticals and to create a task force in charge of organizing joint activities including creating online platforms.

Energy

The Meeting of the BSEC Working Group on Energy was held online on 10 December 2020.

The participants discussed a number of issues. Firstly, those relating to the implementation of the priorities for the third medium-term (2019-2021) of the BSEC Economic Agenda 2012. Secondly, cooperation in the area of Green Energy with a focus on activities of the BSEC Green Energy Network (BSEC-GEN). Thirdly, the outcome of the 7th "Green Energy Investment Forum". Fourthly, the implementation of the initiative "75 UN - 75 trees UNAI SDG7". Last but not least, they reviewed the collaboration between BSEC and other international organizations and institutions in the field of energy.

It was proposed to consider the organizing of a Joint Meeting on Energy and Climate Change aiming to focus on the Resilient and Sustainable Recovery Plans that BSEC Member States may have already developed.



Transport

The Ministerial Meeting of Transport of the BSEC Member States was held online on 24 November 2020. It was preceded by the Meeting of the BSEC Working Group on Transport.

Representatives from BSEC Member States, BSEC Related Bodies, BSEC Observers, Sectoral Dialogue Partners and international organizations all participated.

It was emphasized, once again, that the region covered by the territories of BSEC Member States is of paramount geostrategic importance, as it straddles three continents. Transport is a sector where much has still to be done, not by each Member State alone, but in a coordinated and therefore more effective way, especially during the Covid-19 outbreak. It was agreed that this coordination is necessary not only among BSEC Members, but also with other States and Institutions, such as the EU and TRACECA, (Transport Corridor Europe-Caucasus-Asia) who are implementing similar projects in neighbouring areas to the BSEC region.

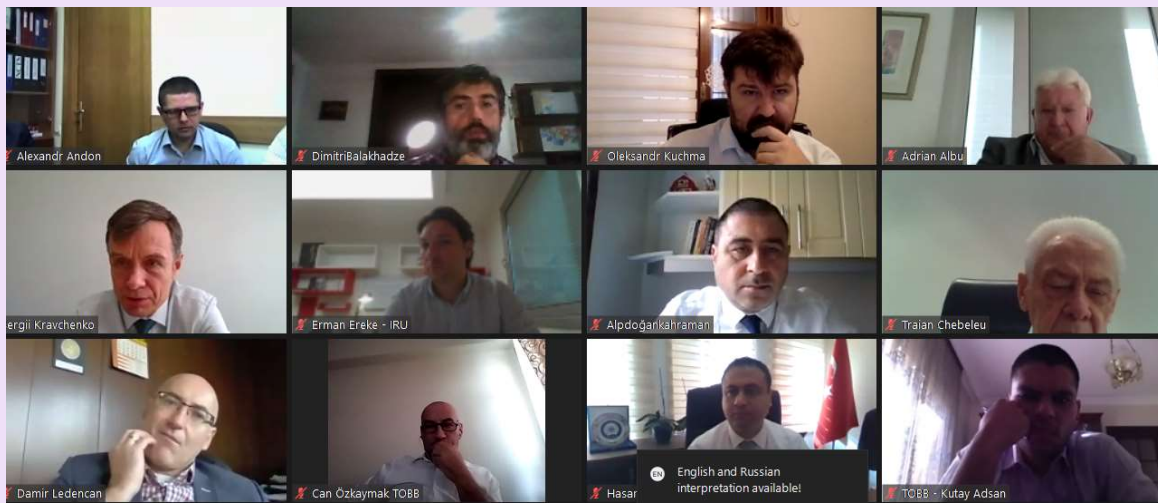
Referring to the two “pet projects” of the BSEC Organization, namely the Black Sea Ring Highway (BSRH) and the Motorways of the Sea (MoS), the BSEC PERMIS Secretary General Ambassador M.B. Christides stressed the need for more motivated involvement and focus of the Member States during the ongoing efforts for the projects’ implementation. He recounted recent initiatives of the BSEC PERMIS, to revitalize the projects, in particular through the financial possibilities offered by the Eastern Partnership (EaP) and by linking up with similar projects of the European Union and other entities.



More BSEC Transport Permits Released to some Member Countries

The Meeting of the BSEC Member States participating in the Project "BSEC Permit System" was held online on 21 October 2020. Attendees considered the current position with regard to the usage of permits in 2020 and they underlined the continuing importance of the BSEC Permit System as a useful tool in the international transport of goods, especially during the Covid-19 pandemic.

It was agreed to increase the number of permits for the year 2021 from 1000 to 1500 for Albania, Georgia, Moldova, Romania, Serbia, Turkey and Ukraine and to release 800 for Armenia. Views were also exchanged on options related to data exchange and on technical aspects of the e-Permit System.



Consultations with the Permanent Secretariat of the Transport Community Treaty (TCT)

On 9 December 2020 the BSEC PERMIS held informal online consultations with the Permanent Secretariat of the *Transport Community Treaty* (TCT), an international organization in the field of mobility and transport, established under the Treaty in 2017.

The aim of the consultations, held on the initiative of the TCT Secretariat, was to jointly explore possibilities and ways of cooperation between the BSEC Organization and the Transport Community, in order to promote initiatives and projects that aim to improve the transport connections of Western Balkan states to the rest of the Europe and among themselves.

The BSEC PERMIS Secretary General, Ambassador M.B. Christides and the Director of the Transport Community's Permanent Secretariat, Mr. Matej Zakonjšek, exchanged views on prospects for future cooperation and shared information regarding the activities and plans carried forward by their respective organizations.

Ambassador Christides and Mr. Zakonjšek underlined their readiness to maintain further working contacts, especially after the exchange of documents, in order to focus on concrete proposals to build coordination and synergies in the field of transportation.



In addition to the meetings of the Working Group on Emergency Assistance, Working Group on Energy, Working Group and Ministerial Meeting on Transport, and the events cited above, the following working groups met during the last months of the year 2020:

Working Group on Customs Matters, Working Group on Banking and Finance, Joint Meeting of the WG on Cooperation in Combating Crime, Network of Liaison Officers in Combating Crime, Working Group on Information and Communication Technologies, Working Group on Trade and Economic Development, Working Group on SMEs.

Other News

56th Plenary Session of the PABSEC General Assembly - Covid-19 Dominates Recommendations



The 56th Plenary Session of the PABSEC General Assembly was held online on 24 November 2020. First Deputy Secretary General, Ambassador Mrs. Ebru Barutçu Gökdenizler, represented BSEC PERMIS in the General Assembly and provided substantive information on the activities of BSEC during the second half of 2020.

Among issues discussed during the Assembly was the approval of various PABSEC Recommendations, in particular those focusing on “*The Role of Parliaments in Combating the Pandemic*”, in its three different aspects – economic, political and social.

Among the PABSEC recommendations to the national parliaments and the governments of the BSEC Member States coming out of the meeting were:

- (a) to provide necessary support for economic policies and strategies implemented during the COVID-19 pandemic;
- (b) to make the effort to remove, in accordance with national legal frameworks, trade restrictions and protectionist measures, in relation to the pandemic, and to refrain from applying new restrictive trade measures in the process of the economic recovery;
- (c) to take appropriate measures regarding transport infrastructure, such as simplification of transportation procedures and implementation of the key transport conventions that will ensure continuity of supply chains and accelerated transport of essential goods;

- (d) to provide further support to medical appliances and protective equipment production industries;
- (e) to invigorate cooperation at the level of business organizations;
- (f) to implement safety and health measures that will gradually restore tourist flows among the BSEC Member States;
- (g) to take steps to further promote local tourism and accommodate visitors from their own countries;
- (h) to increase efforts to keep agriculture running safely and take concrete and long-term measures to protect farmers and producers from the volatility of the current crisis;
- (i) to develop new mechanisms of regional cooperation.



Food and Agriculture
Organization of the
United Nations

FAO Regional Conference for Europe on Food Systems and Diets

BSEC PERMIS was invited to participate in the 32nd Session of the FAO Regional Conference for Europe, held online on 2-4 November 2020, organized by the Ministry of Agriculture of Uzbekistan and the FAO Regional Office for Europe and Central Asia.

The event was attended by over 270 representatives of FAO Member States from Europe and Central Asia, by several international governmental and non-governmental organizations, by civil society organizations and by members of the private sector.

The conference focused on two main topics: *the Sustainable Food Systems and Healthy Diets in Europe and Central Asia*, in light of the upcoming

UN Food Systems Summit in 2021, and *Solutions for Youth, Employment and Developing Rural Areas*, in relation to the United Nations Decade of Family Farming, linked to the current 'food systems' approach.

The representative of BSEC PERMIS presented information on the establishment of the *BSEC Regional Cooperation Centre for Sustainable Food Systems*.

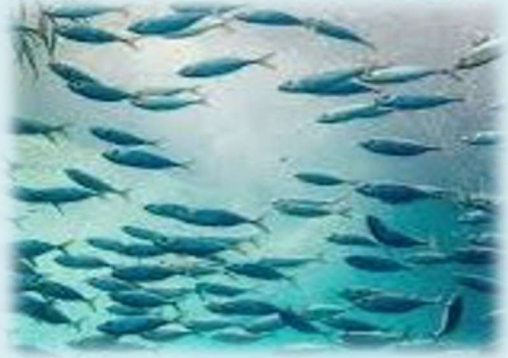
The discussions held on *sustainable agri-food systems and healthy diets* highlighted that these systems in Europe and Central Asia are diverse and at different stages of development.

The main ideas, conclusions and recommendations resulting from the discussions, which were incorporated into the Report of the Conference, form the basis of proposals to the Food Systems Summit – aimed at transforming food systems to realize the vision of the 2030 Agenda – which will be convened by the United Nations in 2021.

Building a new strategy for Mediterranean and Black Sea Fisheries and Aquaculture – together!

A High-level online meeting was organized on Mediterranean and Black Sea Fisheries and Aquaculture by the *General Fisheries Commission for the Mediterranean* (GFCM) on 3 November 2020.

The aim of the meeting was to have an exchange of views at the highest governmental level to re-invigorate political commitment towards achieving the long-term goals of the GFCM, in line with the 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda. It was also to launch the process for the development of a new strategy towards ensuring the sustainability of fisheries and aquaculture in the Mediterranean and the Black Sea.



Future possibilities of interaction between BSEC PERMIS and the GFCM, including co-organizing joint events and participation of PERMIS representatives in GFCM meetings, were also discussed on the side-lines of this important and influential event.

United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

A High-Level Conference of BSEC Member States was held on "*The intensification of regional cooperation for the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals*" on 10 November 2020.

A distinguished selection of over 100 speakers and contributors participated in three detailed and expert sessions of the Conference on: "*Sustainable transport and connectivity and the Covid-19 context*"; "*Environment and Green Energy*" and "*Sustainable Economic Development and Competitiveness*".

The BSEC PERMIS Secretary General Ambassador M.B. Christides, stressed the need for BSEC Member States to operate in harmony. He added that in order to achieve the satisfactory implementation of the United Nations' SDGs, regional cooperation is imperative, not only because the SDGs do not recognize state borders, but also because the negative impact of their absence in one country affects their possible implementation in all neighbouring states.



New Ways Forward to Tackle Plastics Pollution in the Black Sea!

A Regional Stakeholders Workshop on “*Economic opportunities of a circular economy: tackling plastic and micro-plastic pollution in the Black Sea region*” was held online on 17 November 2020.

By the end of the session, important strides forward were taken to combat the growing plastic problem, which makes the Black Sea one of the most heavily impacted by human activity in the world. A number of ideas and initiatives were shared by representatives of BSEC Member States and other experts, as were proposals for developing cooperation on new projects to address the plastics issue in the future.

All those attending expressed their willingness to work closer together and deepen their coordination in future months. They also agreed that raising public awareness on the issue of plastics’ pollution necessitates new and innovative approaches, including reaching out to people who live many miles from coastal areas, as their waste also streams into the Black Sea.



Participants were extremely pleased to learn that the implementation of the Marine Litter in the Black Sea Project, funded by a grant to BSEC PERMIS from EU/DG NEAR, is due to begin in January 2021.



How to get the tourism industry back on its feet?

In an attempt to provide a unified message of hope and support a strong recovery for Tourism amid the unprecedented Covid-19 pandemic, numerous prominent panellists from around the globe took part in the *Global Tourism Forum - Recovery & Beyond, Summit 2020* on 27 November 2020. Discussions were held on how the industry can “get back on its feet” and what needs to be done to prepare for the day after COVID-19.

The BSEC PERMIS Secretary General Ambassador M.B. Christides addressed the Forum via video message. He outlined the activities and accomplishments of BSEC during the challenging pandemic period. He told the Forum that one of the most important activities BSEC PERMIS has promoted in recent months is the establishment of a new cooperation platform, the “BSEC Coronavirus Protocols” – a set of safety, health and security measures and actions to be agreed, which will allow for a gradual reopening of Tourism flows between its Member States and beyond.

He reiterated the need and urgency for greater cooperation and coordination among all countries, especially given that travel and tourism are among the biggest economic casualties of the COVID-19 pandemic.

The speech of Ambassador Christides is available on this link:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cvMhf3DmB0Q&ab_channel=GlobalTourismForum

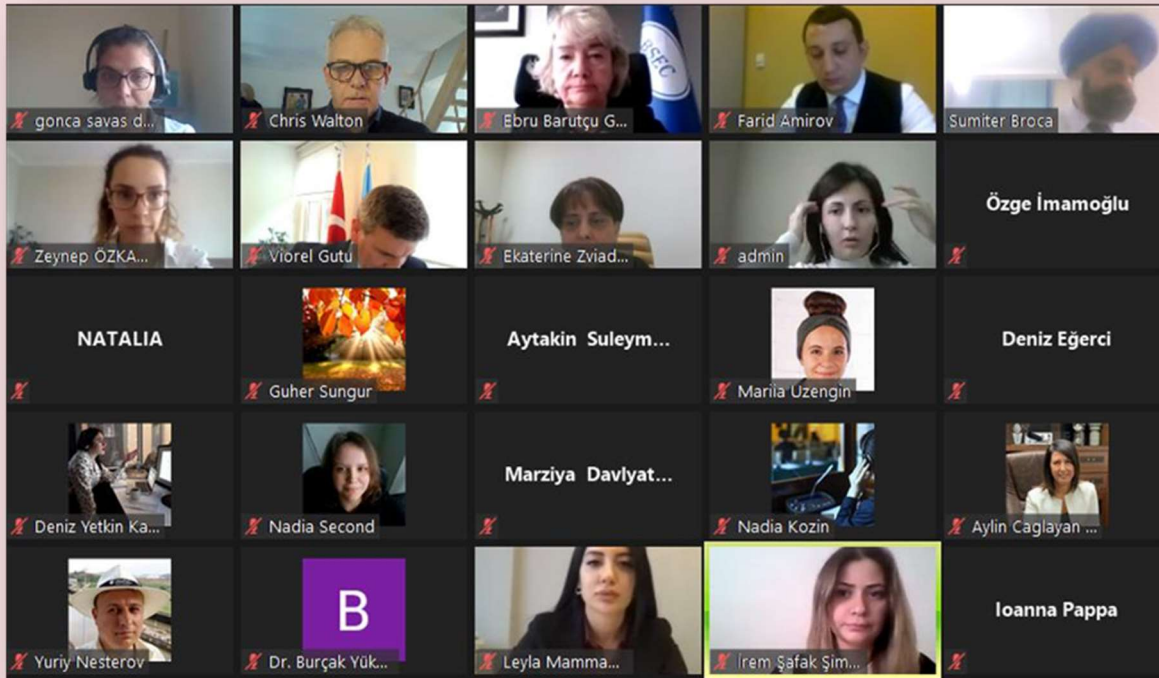
The BSEC Regional Cooperation Centre for Sustainable Food Systems (BSEC CSFS) is launched!

In conjunction with the *Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO)* of the United Nations and the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry of the Republic of Turkey, a Virtual Project Launch Workshop was held on 8 December 2020 to mark the establishment of the *BSEC Regional Cooperation Centre for Sustainable Food Systems*. BSEC PERMIS was represented by First Deputy Secretary General, Ambassador Mrs. Ebru Barutçu Gökdenizler.

The new body, the BSEC CSFS, which became operational on the 1st of August 2020, aims to create greater awareness among BSEC Member States on sustainable food systems and to improve mutual cooperation to generate increased food security and healthier nutrition in the Black Sea region.

It is hoped that by 2023, BSEC Member States will have enhanced capacity to analyse and monitor food sustainability and implement projects to make food systems more sustainable.

The First Deputy Secretary General of BSEC PERMIS, Ambassador Ebru Barutcu Gökdenizler, said "*the vast agricultural potential of the Black Sea region and the fact that trade in agricultural products is an important source of revenue for many BSEC countries, places the topic of agriculture as one of the main fields of focus and cooperation within the framework of the BSEC Organization*".





Common Maritime Agenda for the Black Sea
REGIONAL STAKEHOLDERS ONLINE CONFERENCE
Thursday 10 December 2020 (10:00 – 13:30 EET)

Possible creation of a “Black Sea Brand” on Eco-tourism within the Black Sea Marine Protected Area and a network of “Green Ports” in the Black Sea!

The high-profile Common Maritime Agenda for the Black Sea 2020 Regional Stakeholders Conference was held online, hosted by the Bulgarian CMA Coordination on 10 December 2020.

The aim of the conference, organized with the support of the new *Black Sea Assistance Mechanism* (BSAM), was to mobilize regional stakeholders in the complex process of identifying flagship projects supporting the CMA.

Three thematic sessions were held on: coastal and maritime tourism; maritime transport and fisheries and aquaculture. Digitalization and the circular economy were included in all three thematic sessions as essential drivers to boost sustainable activities while enhancing resilience in the Black Sea.

Two ideas that emerged from the thematic sessions were, firstly, to try to create a ‘Black Sea Brand’ on Eco-tourism within the Black Sea Marine Protected Area and secondly, a network of ‘Green Ports’ in the Black Sea.

On litter, the conference was told that Covid-19 had made the problem of plastic pollution in the Black Sea a lot worse and it needed urgent action.



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BSEC Meets the EU

The informal annual meeting of the BSEC Organization with the COEST Working Party of the EU Council of Ministers (“The Working Party on Eastern Europe and Central Asia”) was held online on 11 December 2020.

The deliberations during the meeting focused on:

- (a) the priorities and activities of the Romanian BSEC Chairmanship-in-Office;
- (b) the overall picture of BSEC PERMIS activities and, especially, the recent developments in its cooperation with the EU;
- (c) the latter’s approach towards the Black Sea region, including recent and potential activities in the field of the Blue Economy and the EU response to the COVID-19 pandemic; and, last but not least,
- (d) the exchange of views and proposals by the participants.

In his speech, the BSEC PERMIS Secretary General Ambassador M.B. Christides stressed that the content of the annual BSEC – COEST meetings had radically changed during recent years: they were now useful occasions for decisive discussions and practical deliberations on concrete, tangible and mutually beneficial initiatives and projects.

He underlined that BSEC Member States wish to be strongly involved in the formulation and implementation of good practices or EU-led projects that concern the Black Sea, because regional ownership and bottom-up approaches are the only way to achieve lasting and sustainable development in the region.

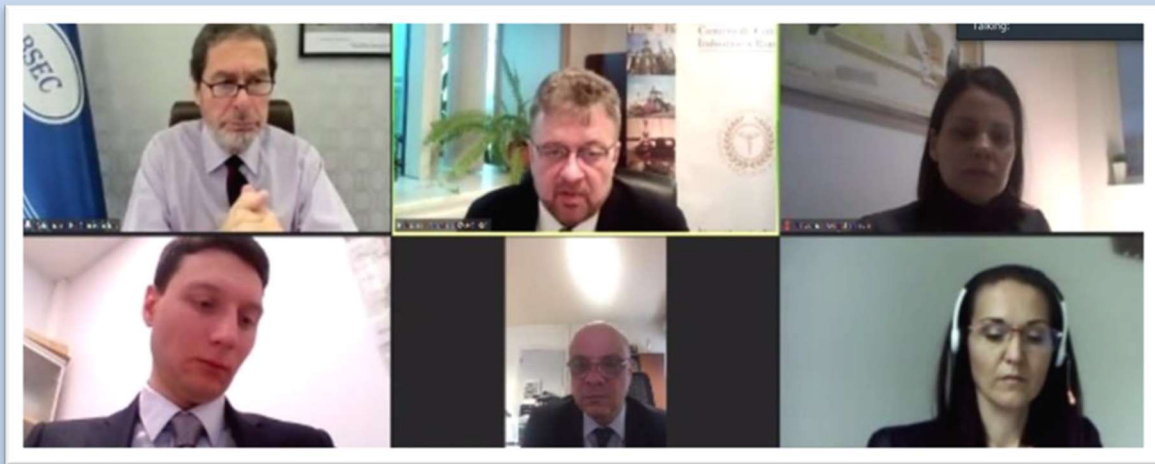


A new Permanent Secretariat of the BSEC Business Council?

The 62nd Regular Meeting of the Board of Directors of the BSEC Business Council was held online on 16 December 2020, hosted by the Romanian Chamber of Commerce and Industry.

Following the presentation of the report on the Business Council's activities during the Romanian Chairmanship-in-Office, the Board of Directors discussed changes to its Statutes to allow more Business Support Organizations (BSOs) and companies to become affiliates. It also discussed the possibility of establishing a Permanent Secretariat of the BSEC Business Council.

The BSEC PERMIS Secretary, General Ambassador M.B. Christides said that establishing the Secretariat would strongly improve the coordination between the BSEC Organization and the Business Council at a time when BSEC PERMIS is increasingly engaged in concrete projects with generous funding from third parties.



BSEC PERMIS bids farewell to former colleagues and welcomes the newly-arrived!.

Ambassador Llesh Kola, Executive Manager, and Mr. Teimuraz Antelava, Legal Advisor, concluded their term-in-office at the Secretariat. To both departing colleagues we convey our sincere gratitude for their valuable contribution to the work of the Organization, as well as for their exemplary professionalism and warm friendship during their tenure at BSEC PERMIS. At the same time, we extend our heartfelt “welcome” to their successors and new colleagues, Ambassador Venera Domi, Executive Manager, and Ms. Nino Kajaia, Legal Advisor, who assumed their duties from the 1st of January 2021





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