



## WEBINAR ON WOMEN IN DIPLOMACY

**“WOMEN DIPLOMATS AT THE FOREFRONT:  
PROMOTING DIALOGUE AND DEVELOPMENT IN THE BLACK SEA”**

Monday 9 March 2026 | 11.00 - 13.45 EEST



Under the auspices of the Georgian BSEC Chairmanship-in-Office



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## CONCEPT NOTE

On the occasion of **International Women’s Day (8 March)**, the **Permanent International Secretariat of the Organization of the Black Sea Economic Cooperation (BSEC PERMIS)**, in cooperation with the **International Centre for Black Sea Studies (ICBSS)**, and under the auspices of the Georgian BSEC Chairmanship-in-Office, will convene a webinar entitled **“Women Diplomats at the Forefront: Promoting Dialogue and Development in the Black Sea.”**

The webinar seeks to underscore the essential contribution of women to advancing regional cooperation, fostering constructive dialogue, promoting peace, stability, and sustainable development in the Black Sea region. It aligns with international commitments to gender equality and women’s empowerment, including the UN Sustainable Development Goals, in particular SDG 5 (Gender Equality) and SDG 16 (Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions).

Women’s participation and leadership in diplomacy are widely recognized as key enablers of inclusive governance and effective multilateralism. Evidence and practice demonstrate that women bring diverse perspectives, enhance consensus-building processes, and contribute to more sustainable and inclusive outcomes in peacebuilding, conflict prevention, and regional cooperation initiatives.

The webinar will bring together senior women diplomats and practitioners from BSEC Member States and partner countries/institutions, providing a platform for the exchange of experiences, good practices, and policy-oriented perspectives.

Discussions will focus on:

- The contribution of women to dialogue, peace, and cooperation in the wider Black Sea region;
- The role of women in strengthening BSEC as a confidence-building and conflict-prevention framework;
- The impact of increased gender balance in diplomatic services on shaping a more inclusive, resilient, and forward-looking regional vision;
- Progress achieved in women’s empowerment and gender equality leading to increased representation of women in ambassadorial, consular, and senior diplomatic roles.

The webinar will take place on **Monday, 9 March 2026, from 11:00 to 13:30 (Istanbul time)**. It aims to both recognize the contributions of women in diplomacy and encourage continued efforts to promote gender equality and women’s leadership in regional and international affairs, with a view to strengthening cooperation, peace, and sustainable development in the Black Sea region.



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## DRAFT AGENDA

11.00 - 11.15

### Opening of the Webinar

**Maria NIKOLTSIOU**

News Anchor-Journalist at Alpha Satellite Television SA, Hellenic Republic

Welcome remarks

**H.E. Ambassador Lazăr COMĂNESCU**

BSEC PERMIS Secretary-General

Introductory remarks

**George MITRAKOS**

ICBSS Director General

11.15 - 11.30

### High-Level Opening Session

Statement by the Georgian BSEC Chairmanship-in-Office

Presented by **Ana GABITASHVILI**

Counsellor of Regional International Organizations Division, Department of International Organizations, Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Georgia

Keynote Address:

**Women's Leadership in Diplomacy and Multilateral Cooperation**

**Prof. Nilüfer NARLI**

Professor of Political Sociology at Bahçeşehir University, Republic of Türkiye

11.30 - 12.10

### Session I:

#### Women Diplomats Advancing Dialogue and Peace in the Black Sea Region

Focus: Women's contribution to dialogue, peacebuilding, and conflict prevention  
Added value of women's participation in multilateral diplomacy

Moderator:

**Maria NIKOLTSIOU**

News Anchor-Journalist at Alpha Satellite Television SA, Hellenic Republic

Speakers:

**H.E. Ambassador Sanja MILINKOVIĆ**

Coordinator in the Department for Multilateral Cooperation Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Serbia

**Irina NOSOVA**

Deputy Director of the Department for Economic Cooperation Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation

**Svetlana ANDRIES**

Deputy Country representative at UN Woman, Republic of Moldova

**Karine SUJAYAN**

Head, Human Rights and Humanitarian Issues Department Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Armenia

**Zhala IBRAHIMOVA**

Acting Head of the Department for Cooperation with International Human Rights Institutions, Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Azerbaijan



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12.10 - 12.30

#### Interactive Discussion / Q&A Session

Moderated questions from participants  
Brief responses from panelists (2–3 minutes each)

12.30 - 13.10

#### Session II – Special Panel: Strengthening Regional Cooperation through Women’s Leadership

Focus: Women’s leadership within BSEC and regional frameworks  
Gender-inclusive diplomacy as a tool for confidence-building  
Shaping an inclusive and resilient vision for the Black Sea region

##### Moderator:

**Ana KRSTINOVSKA**

PhD, President of ESTIMA Organization, Republic of North Macedonia

##### Speakers:

**H.E. Mimi KODHELI**

Former Minister of Defense of the Republic of Albania

**Tanya MIHAYLOVA**

Director, Diplomatic Institute, Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Bulgaria

**Roberta ANASTASE**

Former President of the Chamber of Deputies of Romania

**Prof. Ella LIBANOVA**

IPL Expert, Ptoukha Institute for Demography and Social Studies  
of the National Academy of Sciences of Ukraine

13.10 - 13.30

#### Interactive Discussion / Q&A Session

Moderated questions from participants  
Brief responses from panelists (2–3 minutes each)

13.30 - 13.45

#### Summary of key messages and takeaways

**Maria NIKOLTSIOU**

News Anchor-Journalist at Alpha Satellite Television SA, Hellenic Republic

#### Closing remarks

**H.E. Ambassador Merve Safa KAVAKCI**

BSEC PERMIS First Deputy Secretary-General



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## SPEAKERS / MODERATORS

(in alphabetical order)

### **Roberta Alma ANASTASE**

**Former President of the Chamber of Deputies of Romania**

**Speaker at Session II – Special Panel:  
“Strengthening Regional Cooperation through Women’s Leadership”**



Roberta Alma ANASTASE is a Romanian politician with extensive experience in national and European affairs. She has served as Senator of Romania since 2020 and as Secretary of the Senate since 2023. Ms. Anastase has previously held multiple terms as Deputy in the Romanian Parliament and was President of the Chamber of Deputies from 2008 to 2012. She also served as Member of the European Parliament, where she was Vice-Chair of the Subcommittee on Security and Defence and rapporteur on the Black Sea Synergy. A PhD candidate in Political Science at the University of Bucharest, she has a background in sociology and European studies and has received several international distinctions for her public service.

### **Svetlana ANDRIES**

**Deputy Country representative at UN Woman  
Republic of Moldova**

**Speaker at Session I:  
Women Diplomats Advancing Dialogue and Peace in the Black Sea Region**



Svetlana ANDRIES is the Deputy Country Representative at the UN Women Moldova office. She joined UN Women in September 2015 as Programme Manager of the joint UN Women-UNDP programme, 'Women in Politics'. Ms. Andries previously served as Head of the International Relations and Investments Division at the Ministry of Regional Development and Construction of the Republic of Moldova. She has been a member of various national committees, including those on joint border management, diaspora and migration, the GEF Small Grants Programme, the Joint Monitoring Committee of CBC projects, the EU Strategy for the Danube Region and the Donor Group on Energy, as well as a national project assessor. Ms. Andries holds a Master's degree in Business Administration and a university degree in Economics and Law. She has also completed postgraduate studies in security and national defence and diplomacy at the Vienna Diplomatic Academy, and holds a doctorate in Public Administration.

### **H.E. Ambassador Lazăr COMĂNESCU**

**Secretary-General  
BSEC PERMIS**

**Speaker at Opening Session**



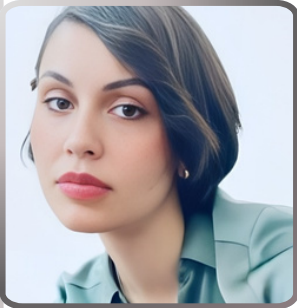
Ambassador Lazăr COMĂNESCU is a Romanian diplomat and economist, currently serving as Secretary General of the BSEC PERMIS. He holds a PhD in international economics from the Bucharest University of Economic Studies and pursued further studies at the Sorbonne. He began his career at Romania's Ministry of Foreign Affairs in 1972, later combining diplomacy with academia. After 1990, he played a key role in Romania's European and Euro-Atlantic integration, serving as Ambassador to NATO and the EU, and twice as Minister of Foreign Affairs (2008; 2015–2017). He was also Ambassador to Germany and adviser to the Romanian President. His distinctions include Romania's Order of Loyal Service, Germany's Grosses Verdienstkreuz, and France's Légion d'Honneur. He has led BSEC PERMIS since July 2021, with his mandate extended through June 2027.



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#### Ana GABITASHVILI

**Counsellor of Regional International Organizations Division  
Department of International Organizations  
Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Georgia**

**Speaker at High-Level Opening Session**

Ana GABITASHVILI is a career diplomat currently serving as a Counsellor at the Department of International Organizations of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Georgia. With extensive experience in bilateral and multilateral diplomacy, she previously held the position of Counsellor at the Department of International Economic Relations. Her diplomatic career includes a tenure as First Secretary at the Embassy of Georgia to Japan (2020–2022) and various roles within the Department for Asia and the Pacific (2018-2020). She has been honored with multiple Certificates of Appreciation from the Minister of Foreign Affairs and the Minister of Economy and Sustainable Development of Georgia. Ms. Gabitashvili holds a Master's degree in International Relations from Ilia State University and a Bachelor's degree from the Free University of Tbilisi.



#### Zhala IBRAHIMOVA

**Acting Head of the Department for Cooperation with International Human Rights Institutions  
Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Azerbaijan**

**Speaker at Session I:**

**Women Diplomats Advancing Dialogue and Peace in the Black Sea Region**

Zhala IBRAHIMOVA serves as Acting Director of the Department for Cooperation with International Human Rights Institutions, at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Azerbaijan. She has experience in multilateral diplomacy, human rights, international law and treaties, international security policy and political-military affairs. She is responsible for cooperation with the United Nations human rights mechanisms, the Council of Europe, the human dimension of OSCE and inter-parliamentary diplomacy. Ms. Ibrahimova has also served as Deputy Permanent Representative of the Republic Azerbaijan to the Council of Europe. She holds an LLM and an LLB degrees in International Law from Baku State University with honours.



#### H.E. Ambassador Merve Safa KAVAKCI

**First Deputy Secretary-General  
BSEC PERMIS**

**Speaker at Closing Session**

Amb. Dr. Merve Safa KAVAKCI is First Deputy Secretary General of the Organization of the Black Sea Economic Cooperation (appointed 2023). She previously served on Türkiye's Ministry of Foreign Affairs Advisory Board and as Ambassador to Malaysia (2018–2022). An academic by background, she directed the Postcolonial Studies Research Center at Üsküdar University and taught International Relations at George Washington University and Howard University. Elected in 1999 as the first hijab-wearing Muslim woman in the Turkish Parliament, she was barred from serving, lost her citizenship, and later won a 2007 case at the European Court of Human Rights; her expulsion was annulled in 2017. She holds a PhD from Howard University, an MPA from Harvard University, and a BS from the University of Texas.



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#### **H.E. Mimi KODHELI**

**Former Minister of Defence  
Republic of Albania**



**Speaker at Session II – Special Panel:  
“Strengthening Regional Cooperation through Women’s Leadership”**

Mimi KODHELI is the Chairperson of the Foreign Affairs Committee of the Parliament of the Republic of Albania and former Minister of Defence (2013–2017). She has also served as Vice President of the NATO Parliamentary Assembly and Chair of its Socialist and Social Democrats Group. An expert in international finance, economic policy, and security affairs, she has contributed to key defense and foreign policy reforms and is a frequent speaker at international forums. Ms. Kodheli has also served as Prefect of the Tirana County and, in 2009, was elected Member of Parliament holding the position of Deputy Chairman of the Economy and Finance Committee during the whole legislation. She holds a PhD in International Finance from the University of Verona, an MBA from Lincoln University, and a Bachelor’s degree from the University of Tirana. She has been awarded the Chevalier de la Légion d’honneur by the French Republic.

#### **Ana KRSTINOVSKA**

**Founder and President  
ESTIMA**



**Moderator at Session II – Special Panel:  
“Strengthening Regional Cooperation through Women’s Leadership”**

Ana KRSTINOVSKA, PhD, is a foreign policy strategist with a career at the intersection of research, international cooperation and diplomacy. Educated at the College of Europe in Bruges, Beijing Foreign Studies University, and Ss. Cyril and Methodius University in Skopje, Dr. Krstinovska combines academic rigor with practical statecraft. As the founder and president of ESTIMA, she engages in critical dialogue on global governance, economic development, and regional stability. Her portfolio includes serving as State Secretary for European Affairs for the Government of North Macedonia and First Secretary at the Permanent Mission to the EU in Brussels. In 2016 she was selected for the U.S. Department of State International Visitor Leadership Program (IVLP) - "Women Leaders for Peace and Security."

#### **Prof. Ella LIBANOVA**

**IPL Expert  
Ptoukha Institute for Demography and Social Studies  
National Academy of Sciences of Ukraine**



**Speaker at Session II – Special Panel:  
“Strengthening Regional Cooperation through Women’s Leadership”**

Ella LIBANOVA is a socio-economist and demographer, Academician of the National Academy of Sciences of Ukraine, and Director of the Mykhailo Ptoukha Institute for Demography and Life Quality Research of the National Academy of Sciences of Ukraine. A Doctor of Economics and Professor, she has devoted her career to research on population dynamics, labour markets, poverty, migration, and human development. She has advised the President and Government of Ukraine and represented the country at UN and international policy forums. Prof. Libanova has authored more than 200 scholarly works, including reports for international organizations, and contributed to national strategies on demographic development and pension reform. Her research and policy work focus on human capital and social resilience, shaping evidence-based responses to Ukraine’s demographic and socio-economic challenges.



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#### **Tanya MIHAYLOVA**

**Director  
Bulgarian Diplomatic Institute  
Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Bulgaria**

**Speaker at Session II – Special Panel:  
“Strengthening Regional Cooperation through Women’s Leadership”**

Tanya MIHAYLOVA is the Director of the Diplomatic Institute to the Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Bulgaria since February 1, 2012. She has a master’s degree in law and has experience as Parliamentary Secretary at the MFA, as a lawyer and as a legal expert at the Bulgarian Parliament. Ms. Mihaylova is the Bulgarian representative in the Steering Committees of the Diplomatic Academy of the EU and the European Security and Defense College, the Board of Directors of the EU Institute for Security Studies, the International Forum on Diplomatic Training. She also has additional professional qualifications from the College of Europe in Bruges, NATO’s Training Center, the Clingendael Academy of the Netherlands, École nationale d’administration (ENA) in Paris and the U.S. Department of State.



#### **H.E. Ambassador Sanja MILINKOVIĆ**

**Coordinator in the Department for Multilateral Cooperation  
Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Serbia**

**Speaker at Session I:  
Women Diplomats Advancing Dialogue and Peace in the Black Sea Region**

Ambassador Sanja MILINKOVIĆ is a career diplomat since 1988. She has held a number of senior posts both in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) and Embassies of the former Yugoslavia, respectively Serbia where her work was focused on international legal issues, but also multilateral and bilateral relations. She has headed numerous negotiating teams both in bilateral and multilateral contexts and has participated in various international conferences relating to international law and meetings of MFA Chief Legal Advisers. During Serbia’s Chairmanships in the OSCE (2015) and BSEC (2023), Ambassador Milinković participated in the work of those organisations as a senior official.



#### **Georgios MITRAKOS**

**Director General  
International Centre for Black Sea Studies (ICBSS)**

**Speaker at Opening Session**

Georgios MITRAKOS is the Director General of the International Centre for Black Sea Studies (ICBSS). He has more than fifteen years of experience in foreign policy advisory and public relations. His expertise includes politics, international relations, confidence building measures with emphasis on the Black Sea region, Southeast Europe, and Visegrad region. Prior to assuming his post at ICBSS, Mr. Mitrakos has worked as chief advisor at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Hellenic Republic and special advisor at the Ministry of Regional Development, Competitiveness and Shipping and the Ministry of State and Strategic Investments. Mr. Mitrakos holds an MSc in Politics and Communication from the London School of Economics and a BSc in Political Science and Public Administration from the National and Kapodistrian University of Athens.





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#### **Prof. Nilüfer NARLI**

**Professor of Political Sociology  
Bahçeşehir University**

**Keynote Address:**

**Women’s Leadership in Diplomacy and Multilateral Cooperation**



Prof. Nilufer NARLI is the Founding Director of the Center for Health, Society and Prevention Studies at Bahçeşehir University. She holds a PhD in Political Sociology from University Sains Malaysia and has received an Eisenhower Fellowship in 1993. She founded Bahçeşehir’s Sociology Department and served as Vice Rector. Prof. Narli has previously served as founding dean at Kadir Has University and founder of Sociology at Marmara University, and has also taught at Istanbul University. Her research spans religious movements in the Muslim world, migration, gender, political memory, regional conflicts, and COVID-19 studies. She has led international conferences, directed TÜBİTAK-funded projects, and joined global forums on security and civil-military relations. Active with women’s NGOs, she has trained Balkan organisations and served on Turkish delegations to UN gender sessions. Prof. Narli also supports arts initiatives, symposiums and festivals.

#### **Maria NIKOLTSIOU**

**News Anchor-Journalist  
Alpha Satellite Television SA**

**Moderator at Session I:**

**Women Diplomats Advancing Dialogue and Peace in the Black Sea Region**



Maria NIKOLTSIOU is a journalist, news anchor and political commentator at Alpha TV. She is also a radio producer at Alpha Radio 98.9, where she contributes to public dialogue through interviews and current affairs programming. She graduated from Panteion University with a degree in Sociology, and went on to earn an MSc in European Studies from the London School of Economics and an MA in International Relations from the University of Kent. Throughout her career, Ms. Nikoltsiou has conducted high-profile interviews and moderated discussions with prominent political figures and decision-makers, establishing herself as a respected voice in the Greek media landscape. Her academic background in sociology, European policy and international relations informs her journalistic approach, enabling her to contextualise domestic developments within broader European and global dynamics.

#### **Irina NOSOVA**

**Deputy Director General of the Department for Economic Cooperation  
Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation**

**Speaker at Session I:**

**Women Diplomats Advancing Dialogue and Peace in the Black Sea Region**



Irina NOSOVA is the Deputy Director General of the Department of Economic Cooperation at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation. She joined the Foreign Ministry in 2004. She has experience working on economic issues with multilateral and regional organisations such as the G20, WTO, OECD, APEC and BSEC, and has promoted Russian business interests and foreign investment. Ms. Nosova graduated from MGIMO University in Moscow and holds a PhD in History.



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#### **Karine SUJAYAN**

**Head of Human Rights and Humanitarian Issues Department  
Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Armenia**

**Speaker at Session I:  
Women Diplomats Advancing Dialogue and Peace in the Black Sea Region**



Karine SUJAYAN is a career diplomat with over 33 years of experience. She has extensive experience in multilateralism. She is currently the Head of the Human Rights and Humanitarian Issues Department at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Armenia. Ms. Sujayan began her diplomatic career following Armenia's independence and specializes in human rights, leading national policy development and engagement with international mechanisms. A graduate of Yerevan State University, she has completed advanced training at leading human rights institutions. Ms. Sujayan currently serves as the Chair of the Inter-Ministerial Commission on Women, Peace and Security and as the Coordinator of the National Mechanism for Implementation, Reporting, and Follow-up. She holds the diplomatic rank of Envoy Extraordinary and Minister Plenipotentiary.



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## ORGANISERS:



### BSEC PERMIS

The BSEC PERMIS performs the secretarial duties for the **Organization of the Black Sea Economic Cooperation (BSEC Organization)**, a full-fledged intergovernmental, regional economic organization that includes 13 Member States from the wider Black Sea region (Albania, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Bulgaria, Georgia, Greece, Republic of Moldova, Republic of North Macedonia, Romania, Russian Federation, Serbia, Turkiye, and Ukraine).

BSEC has more than 25 areas of cooperation, which are of importance to its Member States, among them environmental protection, agriculture, culture, tourism, science and technology, education, energy, SMEs, emergency assistance, etc. In its 30 years since establishment (1992) BSEC is today the oldest, most representative, most inclusive and institutionally mature intergovernmental Organization in the wider Black sea area, which contributes to the promotion of regional cooperation and economic development.



### ICBSS

The **International Centre for Black Sea Studies (ICBSS)** was founded in 1998 as a non-profit organisation. It has since fulfilled a dual function. On the one hand, it is an independent research and training institution focusing on the wider Black Sea region. On the other hand, it is a related body of the Organisation of the Black Sea Economic Cooperation (BSEC) and serves as its think-tank. Thus, the ICBSS pursues applied, policy-oriented research, promotes knowledge on the Black Sea region both within and outside its boundaries, and offers policy advice with the aim to foster multilateral cooperation among the BSEC member states as well as with their international partners.



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