PRIORITIES
OF THE BSEC HELLENIC CHAIRMANSHIP-IN-OFFICE

“BSEC - Building Support for Economic Cooperation”

The Organisation of the Black Sea Economic Cooperation (BSEC) is the oldest, most representative and institutionally mature regional economic organisation in the wider Black Sea area, bringing together 12 States of the region.

Under the motto “BSEC - Building Support for Economic Cooperation” the Hellenic Chairmanship aspires to further pave the way in achieving the goals set forth by the “Economic Agenda towards an Enhanced BSEC Partnership”, a strategic document approved by the BSEC Council of Ministers of Foreign Affairs and endorsed by the Heads of State and Government, in 2012. In our turbulent times, building support and a sound base for promoting economic cooperation among BSEC Member States acquires a special importance.

Stressing the need for continuity and consistency between the rotating BSEC Chairmanships, Greece will follow-up priorities promoted by the preceding Bulgarian BSEC Chairmanship-in-Office, with the view to further increase the effectiveness, efficiency and international profile of the Organisation.

1. Principal objectives

1. The Hellenic BSEC Chairmanship-in-Office will promote and highlight BSEC’s role as an appropriate forum for developing and implementing concrete projects in the wider Black Sea Region. Greece will support the project-oriented character of the Organisation, in order to achieve a more pragmatic multilateral cooperation among the BSEC Member States and will lay particular emphasis on capacity building in the BSEC PERMIS and, especially, on the functioning of its Project Management Unit.

In this context, the Hellenic Chairmanship will aim to attract and exploit international expertise, in order to provide the Project Management Unit in BSEC PERMIS with the appropriate know-how for assuming project implementation responsibilities.

2. The Hellenic Republic, as an EU and BSEC Member State, will continue the efforts of the Bulgarian Chairmanship-in-Office, to enhance cooperation with the European Union. It is our firm belief that BSEC – EU interaction can and should evolve into a mutually advantageous relationship that will bring tangible results to the wider Black Sea area.

3. The Hellenic BSEC Chairmanship will endeavor to ensure the sustainability of BSEC financial resources for project development, including through the BSEC Project Development Fund.
In this respect, the successful experience of the BSEC Hellenic Development Fund, which served as an additional financial instrument for BSEC projects of regional character, provides a valuable example which can - and should – be emulated by BSEC Member States and partners.

4. Finally, the Hellenic Chairmanship will aim to enhance the efficiency of the BSEC PERMIS and increase the effectiveness of BSEC, by strengthening its financial rules and streamlining the activity of its subsidiary organs.

II. Sectoral priorities

The Hellenic BSEC Chairmanship-in-Office will continue promoting sectoral cooperation in all areas of BSEC activity, with special emphasis on:

a) Health emergency management

In the context of the ever-increasing vulnerability of our societies against cross-border health threats resulting from the global dimension of human activity (such as travel, tourism and trade), the need for establishing mechanisms for the emergency preparedness and response on health threats within the BSEC Region and enhancing further regional cooperation between BSEC Member States in the field of Health Care and Pharmaceuticals is a high priority.

Greece, which ensures the coordination of the relevant BSEC Working Group, will host a meeting of Ministers in charge of Health, as well as an experts’ meeting, in order to achieve better coordination in this field, through the establishment of a “Network for the emergency preparedness and response to health threats within the BSEC Region”.

b) Transport cooperation.

Green transport is a key factor to sustainable mobility and growth, as it involves the effective use of environmentally friendly modes of transport, in order to accommodate rising traffic volumes. In this framework, the Hellenic Chairmanship will work to implement the main provisions of the recently adopted “Sofia Joint Declaration on Greening Transport in BSEC Region” (Sofia, 16 April 2014), which we believe can help our region to achieve easier, more efficient and less expensive modes of transport, both for persons and goods, while at the same time preserving our precious environment.

Greece will further promote inter-modality in transport, as well as the implementation of the two major BSEC projects, namely the Black Sea Ring Highway and the Motorways of the Sea, by supporting and accelerating the work of the Joint Permanent Technical Secretariat of the Black Sea Ring Highway, based in Thessaloniki and the rotating Joint Technical Secretariat of the Motorways of the Sea.

c) Tourism

The Hellenic Chairmanship will further promote the aims set out in the “Declaration of the Ministers in charge of Tourism of the Member States of the Organization of the Black Sea Economic Cooperation” (Kyiv, 10 October 2013). In this context, it will continue promoting the BSEC Region as one of the leading tourist destinations in the world through close cooperation between the BSEC Member States. More specifically, we will encourage the development of film-induced tourism and gastronomic tourism as destination marketing tools in the BSEC countries and we will consider the best ways these forms of tourism can be exploited for creating jobs, for attracting foreign film producers and tourists and for promoting local authentic
food production and ethnic and regional cuisines in the BSEC Region. Moreover, we will continue to further enhance close cooperation with the World Tourism Organisation (UNWTO) and to this end, we will explore possible ways of implementing the Memorandum of Understanding between BSEC and UNWTO, with an emphasis on visa facilitation in the Black Sea Region.

d) Science and Technology and Information and Communication Technologies

Research and Technology play a predominant role in promoting innovation and growth and, as such, are considered of paramount importance for enhancing regional cooperation. The vibrant human resources of the region should be put to value, thus also avoiding a brain-drain that will have a long term impact on Member States.

Greece will aim to stimulate, strengthen and better exploit the huge potential existing in the field of Science and Technology and give priority to facilitating contacts and synergies between ICT Clusters in BSEC Member States.

e) Environment protection and economic development

Ensuring the conservation of our precious natural environment, while at the same time maximizing the growth potential of the Black Sea region are not contradictory objectives; on the contrary, they can be complementary to each other, contributing to the sustainable development of the BSEC region.

In order to profit from this untapped potential, Greece will prioritize cooperation in the areas of protection of the marine environment, coastal and maritime tourism, fisheries and aquaculture and marine energy, with the aim to facilitate the elaboration of concrete, result-oriented projects, taking into account international experience, as well as the valuable contributions of all relevant stakeholders in the Black Sea.

f) Trade and Small and Medium Enterprises

It is a common understanding that trade and business should be the predominant factor in all efforts for promoting cooperation and synergies among BSEC Member States, in particular in an organization of strictly economic character.

To this end, setting the appropriate communicational tools, in other words, selecting a common language and culture in trade and business is a key issue; this will permit the identification of common challenges and constraints facing our business communities in terms of trade, mobility, networking with their potential partners, and allow for a more efficient expansion in domestic and foreign markets.

With this perception in mind, the Hellenic Chairmanship will endeavour to promote cooperation among the Black Sea business communities and will carry on enhancing the innovative potential of Small and Medium sized Enterprises (SMEs), including through the support of clusters and will encourage the entrepreneurial spirit in the Region, by building on the work already carried out by the Bulgarian Chairmanship-in-Office and in line with the Action Plan of the Working Group on SMEs for 2014-2015.

g) Youth and Sports

By introducing the themes of Youth and Sports in BSEC activities, the Bulgarian BSEC Chairmanship-in-Office re-opened to the Organization a highly topical area of cooperation.
The Hellenic Chairmanship will try to further promote the aims set out in the recently adopted “Joint Declaration of BSEC Ministers in charge of Youth and Sports” (Varna, 15 April 2014).

III. Cooperation with the BSEC Related Bodies

The Hellenic Chairmanship-in-Office attaches high importance in ensuring the efficient cooperation between BSEC and its Related Bodies. In this context, Greece will work closely with the BSEC PERMIS and the BSEC Related Bodies, in order to achieve better coordination and maximize the effect of their respective activities.

Concerning the Parliamentary Assembly of BSEC (PABSEC), Greece accepted to assume for a second, consecutive semester, the Chairmanship-in-Office, following the relevant request of the Moldovan Speaker of Parliament. This development will, among others, help “synchronize”, from the 1st July 2014, the Chairmanships of both the BSEC and the PABSEC, to be assumed by the same Member State, a development which will enhance coordination and synergy, as well as keep the relevant costs at a lower level.

Greece attaches special importance to promoting cooperation between the business communities of the BSEC Member States, with the belief that the smooth, efficient and economically viable cooperation in this field lies with the Member States themselves. In this framework, Greece will continue to support the work of the BSEC Business Council and ensure its productive functioning during its term of office.

In what concerns the Black Sea Trade and Development Bank (BSTDB), headquartered in Thessaloniki, the Hellenic Chairmanship will promote an enhanced and regular exchange of information between the two entities, in an effort to make the Bank increasingly present in the implementation of BSEC-sponsored projects. Further, we will work on the updating of the “Modalities for BSEC – BSTDB interaction”, in force from the year 2000, an endeavor commenced by the Bulgarian Chairmanship.

Concerning the International Centre for Black Sea Studies, headquartered in Athens, we will further broaden the scope of its scientific, research and training activities, as these offer an exceptional publicity and prestige to BSEC itself. The Centre, having a special role in promoting BSEC-EU interaction and serving also as the acknowledged think-tank of BSEC, deserves the attention and esteem of all. In this context we will work to convince the very few Member States, which have not yet ratified the new Article 24 of the BSEC Charter, to do so at their earliest convenience, thus helping render the ICBSS a more operational BSEC related body.

IV. Principal events

The Calendar of Events of the Hellenic BSEC Chairmanship-in-Office includes a number of high-level meetings in different areas of cooperation. Among them:

- The 31st Meeting of the Council of Ministers of Foreign Affairs of the BSEC Member States in December 2014.

- The Informal Meeting of the Council of Ministers of Foreign Affairs of the BSEC Member States in New York in September 2014.

- The Meeting of Ministers in charge of Health of the BSEC Member States.

- The Meeting of the Ministers in charge of Transport of the BSEC Member States.

- The Meeting of the Ministers in charge of Tourism of the BSEC Member States.