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EU and Black Sea Regional Cooperation
Common goals
Common interests

Statement by Ambassador Leonidas Chrysanthopoulos

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(BSEC), Athens

Permanent International secretariat (PERMIS)

I would like, at the outset, to thank the Southeast Europe Association for organizing this Conference on the EU and Black Sea Regional Cooperation and for the hospitality extended to us.

BSEC has been striving for a long time and in particular during the last year, to enhance relations with the EU. We are at last starting to see some tangible results. I would like to express my thanks to the German Presidency and to you, Minister Erler, for the importance given to the Black Sea Region.

On April 11, the Commission issued its Communication on “Black Sea Synergy- a New Regional Cooperation Initiative”. It is a good Communication and should be welcomed as a first important step in enhancing our relations. It also indicates the work that must be done in the main areas of cooperation between the two sides.

The New Neighbourhood Policy Communication of December 4 is interrelated with the Communication of April 11, in spite of inconsistencies existing in the latter. The second communication completes the first. However, the role of BSEC has been downplayed in comparison with its Communication of December 4, on “Strengthening the European Neighbourhood Policy”. To be more precise, the December Communication mentions that “BSEC provides a useful platform for our dialogue and cooperation with the region as a whole. The Commission is currently examining the possibility of establishing closer contacts with BSEC, including observer status. In addition, and building on these closer contacts, it will be useful to establish a regular dialogue with BSEC at Foreign Minister level, which would help implement further the Union’s Black Sea Regional Policy.”

The new Communication mentions that “EU-BSEC links would serve primarily for dialogue at the regional level. This might include meetings between senior officials with a view to better coordinate concrete projects. A kick-off high level political event would provide political orientation and visibility to EU Black Sea Synergy. Should Black Sea Synergy Partners so decide in the light of tangible progress, regular ministerial meetings might take place, attended by the EU and BSEC countries.” (and not BSEC).

Consequently, the role of BSEC appears to have weakened in relation to the December Communication.

The BSEC Council of Ministers of Foreign Affairs that met in Belgrade on April 19, in its Declaration mentions the following on the Commission’s Communication: “... In this regard, the Ministers of Foreign Affairs welcome the Communication of the European Commission on the “Black Sea Synergy – A New Regional Cooperation Initiative” of 11 April 2007 and express their hope that it could be the first step in order to enhance relations between BSEC and the EU, as well as to strengthen the BSEC role within this process.”-

Another objective should be that the EU should be convinced of the political necessity for both sides in having a joint BSEC-EU declaration at the BSEC Summit of June 25th.

The declaration could be of a general nature, inaugurating a new era of enhanced relations between the two Organizations. However, the political message that such a joint declaration would convey would be significant, particularly for the EU, since it would officially announce

to the international community the enhanced presence of the EU in the wider Black Sea region. For BSEC it would show that it is a regional Organization of increased importance also because of its project oriented approach and for the EU it would demonstrate its increasing cooperation in a region that has not been given the importance that it deserves.

The Belgrade Declaration also calls for a joint BSEC-EU declaration that could be adopted on the occasion of the BSEC Summit of June 25.

What is also needed in our future cooperation and interaction with the EU is the participation of the European Commission in our Working Groups. We could invite it as a guest until it obtains the observer status. This would allow, as from now, a closer interaction with the EU from which both sides can benefit.

The Belgrade meeting was a milestone for BSEC. The process of internal reforms that started in Bucharest in April 2006 was completed. Now the decision-making process of BSEC has been simplified and resolutions/decisions can be adopted when the Council of Ministers of Foreign Affairs is no longer in session.

Furthermore, two major projects were signed- the “Memorandum of Understanding for the Coordinated Development of the Black Sea Ring Highway (BSRH)” and the “Memorandum of Understanding on the Development of the Motorways of the Sea at the BSEC Region”, thus inaugurating the project-oriented era of our Organization.

After almost fifteen years of maturing, BSEC is, for the first time in its history, at the stage of implementing major infrastructure projects that not only are changing the image of BSEC internationally, but will also contribute to the economic development of the region and make our Organization relevant to its people. It may also provide an incentive for facilitating the solution of frozen conflicts.

These two projects are also in line with the EU policy concerning the extension of major Trans-European transport axes to the neighbouring countries. Of the five axes connecting the EU and its neighbours that are mentioned in the Commission Communication (COM 2007) 32 final of 31.1.07, our projects would cover the Central axis, the South Eastern axis, and the Motorways of the Sea. Furthermore, we are in consultation with TRACECA on these projects, with which we will be signing very shortly a MoU on cooperation with it. The first MoU can also be used as an incentive for facilitating the resolution of frozen conflicts. To promote this MoU, the Secretariat is organizing with IRU a Black Sea Ring Highway Caravan, consisting of 12 trucks from all BSEC Member States that will travel around the Black Sea. It departed from Belgrade on April 19 and will terminate in Istanbul on May 30. It will also promote the Highway and BSEC to its people and at the same time gather useful information on problems encountered at border crossings as well as on the road situation that will be submitted to the Steering Committee.

As of May 1, Turkey has assumed the Chairmanship of BSEC. Only two months remain before our Summit of June 25th. It will be an important Summit for our Organization since it will endorse the new project oriented policy of BSEC, the reform package and the new era of enhanced relations with the EU. And it will be attended at the highest level by all Member States. We are all working for the success of this Summit.