

Check Against Delivery

**STATEMENT BY
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ORGANIZATION OF THE
BLACK SEA ECONOMIC COOPERATION (BSEC)
PERMANENT INTERNATIONAL SECRETARIAT (PERMIS)**

AT THE

**MEETING OF THE MINISTERS OF TRANSPORT OF
THE COUNTRIES IN THE EURO-ASIAN REGION**

(Geneva, 19 February 2008)

Mr. Chairman,
Esteemed Participants,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am very pleased to be here, at the Meeting of the Ministers of Transport of the countries in the Euro-Asian region, on behalf of the Organization of the Black Sea Economic Cooperation (BSEC).

Allow me here today to share with you information on the main activities and projects of BSEC pertaining to the area of transport.

As you know, BSEC attributes great importance to cooperation in the area of transport and transport infrastructure projects. Within this framework, for the first time in its history, on 19 April 2007, the BSEC Member States signed two Memoranda of Understanding, one on the Development of the Motorways of the Sea in the BSEC Region and the other on the Coordinated Development of the Black Sea Ring Highway, in Belgrade.

The Black Sea Ring Highway project envisages a four lane ring highway system, approximately 7100 km long, to connect the BSEC Member States with each other.

The project on the development of the Motorways of the Sea in the BSEC region, on the other hand, is about strengthening the maritime links among the ports of the BSEC Member States. Activities within this Memorandum of Understanding include the upgrading of port facilities, identification of projects of common interest, securing free and fair competition in international shipping, facilitation of access to all modes of transport and promotion of intermodality and enhancement of maritime security and safety in the BSEC region.

These projects will not only contribute to increasing intra-BSEC trade, but will also facilitate the development of tourism in the region. As a result, these projects are expected to also indirectly support an increase of intra-BSEC investments in the areas of tourism related services, infrastructure and transport. Most importantly, these projects will make a concrete difference in the lives of the people of the region.

What we are trying to do is to make the Black Sea what it was in the 1850s when maritime trade was flourishing. With the establishment of scheduled passenger lines and Ro-Ro ferries that will connect the basic ports of the Black Sea to the Black Sea Ring Highway and to the ports of the Mediterranean, BSEC could develop into an economic power house.

The two projects also constitute regional contributions to the extension of Trans-European Networks and the development of Euro-Asian transport links. They are in line with the EU policy concerning the extension of major Trans-European Transport Axes to the neighboring countries. Of the five axes connecting the EU and its neighbors that are mentioned in the Commission's Communication (COM 2007)32 Final dated 31 January 2007, our projects would cover the Central Axis, the South Eastern Axis and the Motorways of the Sea.

Furthermore, the objectives of the project to develop the Motorways of the Sea in the BSEC region are also in harmony with the Communication of the European Commission concerning an integrated Maritime Policy for the EU of 10 October 2007.

Within this framework, the two projects have drawn great interest most recently from the participants of the Meeting of the Ministers of Foreign Affairs of the European Union and of the Countries of the Wider Black Sea Area which was held in Kyiv last week, on 14 February 2008.

As a matter of fact, we intend to discuss, in the near future, issues related to these two projects in detail with the EU Commission which has been granted Observer status within BSEC in June 2007, so that we can have a harmonized approach on these matters.

Mr. Chairman,
Esteemed Participants,

The Declaration adopted by the BSEC Heads of State and Government at the 15th Anniversary Summit of BSEC on 25 June 2007 in Istanbul, the Joint Declaration on Cooperation in the Sphere of Transport in the BSEC Region on the Occasion of the 15th Anniversary of the BSEC adopted by our Ministers of Transport on 5 July 2007 in Istanbul, as well as the Ankara Declaration of the Council of Ministers of Foreign Affairs of the BSEC Member States dated 25 October 2007 all highlight the importance of proceeding with the implementation of the said Memoranda of Understanding without delay.

In this regard, I am pleased to inform you that although the relevant internal procedures necessary for the entering into force of the said Memoranda are still underway in most of the States Signatories, work has already started to make the necessary preparations for their implementation once they come into force.

In a display of determination to work fast on the Memorandum of Understanding on the Development of the Black Sea Ring Highway, the Steering Committee pertaining to the said Memorandum has already met three times and has agreed on almost all of the basic documents related to the implementation of the Memorandum. This is indeed very encouraging.

In this way, when the Memorandum enters into force, we can immediately proceed with the implementation phase without losing any time. It is envisaged that the Steering Committee will hold its fourth meeting in April 2008.

We acknowledge that constructing the highway is only one aspect of the challenge we have to face. The other aspect is that once the highway is completed, we do not end up with a gigantic traffic jam. Consequently, we are also making efforts to speed up border controls as well as visa facilitation for lorry drivers. We are in consultation with the European Commission on this issue so that it may be solved.

Furthermore, the Declaration of the Ministers of Foreign Affairs of the Member States of the Organization of the Black Sea Economic Cooperation on a BSEC-EU Enhanced Relationship which was adopted at the Special Meeting of the BSEC Council of Ministers of Foreign Affairs in Kyiv on 14 February 2008 invited the EU to join the efforts of BSEC, among other priority areas, in the development and interconnection of transport infrastructure in the region (Black Sea Ring Highway and development of the Motorways of the Sea in the BSEC region) and in facilitating the movement of peoples, including representatives of the business communities and lorry drivers, between the EU and BSEC countries.

Also, in the Joint Statement of the Ministers of Foreign Affairs of the countries of the European Union and of the wider Black Sea area adopted on the same day, the Ministers of Foreign Affairs of the countries of the European Union and of the wider Black Sea area took note of the wish for a possible visa facilitation perspective and the role of enhanced mobility in promoting the development of trade and economic relations.

As part of our efforts to identify the possible elements which could create traffic jams on the Black Sea Ring Highway once it is fully constructed, the BSEC Secretariat, in cooperation with the International Road Transport Union (IRU) and the Union of Road Transport Associations in the BSEC Region (BSEC-URTA), jointly organized the Black Sea Ring Highway Caravan which consisted of 12 trucks from all Member States that went around the existing road infrastructure in the envisaged route of the Black Sea Ring Highway. The Caravan started on 19 April 2007 from Belgrade and terminated on 28 May 2007 in Istanbul. We organized the Caravan to promote BSEC to its people, to the world and to gather information on the existing infrastructure and other problems that we would have to face.

We achieved all these objectives. BSEC-URTA has published a report of our findings which will be useful for the work of the Steering Committee on the Development of the Black Sea Ring Highway. The Caravan monitored the waiting times at the borders during its journey. They were indeed long, the longest being in the east of the Black Sea region.

Hopefully, the situation will be ameliorated with the implementation of the Memorandum of Understanding on the Facilitation of Road Transport of Goods in the BSEC Region, signed in 2006, and the Agreement on the Simplification of Visa Procedures for Professional Drivers Nationals of BSEC Member States which will be signed at the next meeting of the BSEC Council of Ministers of Foreign Affairs in Kyiv, in April 2007.

In short, we are working fast on the preparations for the implementation of the Black Sea Ring Highway project, considering all its aspects and dimensions.

Progress has also been achieved as far as the implementation of the Memorandum of Understanding on the Development of the Motorways of the Sea in the BSEC Region is concerned. In the first meeting of the Ad Hoc Working Group pertaining to this Memorandum of Understanding that was held in Piraeus, Greece, on 29-30 January 2008, the Draft Rules of Procedure of the Ad Hoc Working Group were, in principle, agreed upon and they are expected to be finalized at the second meeting to be held in late March.

Both the Black Sea Ring Highway project and the project on the development of the Motorways of the Sea in the BSEC region have given a new impetus to transport cooperation in BSEC. We hope to achieve as much progress on the ground as possible on the implementation of these

two inter-related projects by the year 2014, when Sochi will be hosting the Winter Olympics.

In the meantime, parallel to its work on these projects, BSEC, as a project-oriented organization, will continue exploring new areas where it is desirable and realistic to develop and deepen multilateral cooperation in a regional format in the transport sphere, which carries particular prominence for our Organization.

Thanking you for your kind attention, I wish you fruitful deliberations with a concrete and successful outcome.
