

*5th Session of the Regional Forum on Sustainable Development
for the UNECE Region
High-level Policy Segment
17 March 2021*

STATEMENT

by

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Distinguished participants,

In accordance with the United Nations 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, our organization has reoriented its work and prioritized the implementation of SDG's and targets within its scope of action.

In response to the pandemic situation, since March 2020 and continuing, BSEC has included this topic on the agenda of all its Working Groups dealing with the areas covered by the SDGs.

Our Organization, like the other international organizations, has been adapting its activities to the challenging developments created by the COVID-19 pandemic. Our conviction is that the appropriate response is increased interaction, enhanced cohesion, constructive dialogue and coordinated action.

Consequently, we have started online activities reaching out to our Member States to coordinate efforts in order to mitigate the negative impact of the pandemic on key sectors of regional cooperation.

One of the main priority is to examine ways to support **Travel and Tourism** industry to recover, given that the fact that tourism contributes greatly to the region's GDP.

To this effect, the Working Group on Cooperation in Tourism is considering a possible agreement on a common platform "*BSEC Coronavirus Protocols in Tourism*" – that would refer to a framework of safety, health and security measures for a safe and gradual re-opening of tourism flows among the Member States and

beyond. In the above endeavour, we are closely aligned with the *United Nations World Tourism Organization*, which offers valuable guidelines and support in this regard.

In addition, our Secretariat launched its new website *BSEC Covid-19 Information Platform* (www.bsec-covidinfo.org), a new “live” information platform that hosts the latest regulations and measures adopted by the Member States in the context of the current emergency. Designed as a “one-stop-shop”, the website provides all the updates and current prerequisites on travel and tourism, as well as numerous news items from the Black Sea region and beyond covering the latest developments in this field.

Analysing the recent challenges impeding the effective **Connectivity** among the BSEC Member States during the Covid-19 pandemic and drawing the necessary policies for enhancing the preparedness against future emergencies is also of vital significance in the wider Black Sea region.

In particular, the road transport issues have become crucially important, given, on the one hand, the ongoing Coronavirus restrictions on movement and, on the other, the necessity to maintain the supply chains open and functioning, especially for essentials such as food and medical equipment.

Our Organization focuses more on the real problems aggravating road-transport in the region, like border-crossing delays, lack of digitalization, and lack of information exchange.

To this end, we have been actively coordinating efforts with our transport partner organizations, first of all, with the *International Road Transport Union* (IRU) and the *Union of the Road Transport Associations* in the BSEC Region (BSEC-URTA) in taking practical steps towards border-crossing facilitation and digitalization of transport documents.

We are closely monitoring transport developments in the BSEC Region in order to further promote the respective cooperation among our Member States, in accordance with the prevailing epidemiological situation.

Another priority has been the **Blue Economy**. Two workshops were organized online, in the second half of 2020, in cooperation with the Directorate General for Maritime Affairs and Fisheries of the European Commission (DG MARE), on how the COVID-19 pandemic affected the Blue Economy in the Black Sea region, with a

view to identifying potential response actions regarding, in particular, coastal and maritime tourism, maritime transport, fisheries and aquaculture, as well as digitalization as a cross-cutting sector.

A new “*Black Sea Virtual Knowledge Centre*” (BSVVC) platform on the BSEC main website has been launched in August 2020 (www.bsec-bsvvc.org). The objective of the BSVVC is to provide a centralized platform for information on the Blue Economy in the Black Sea and to improve synergies between stakeholders and Blue Economy related projects in the region, while functioning as stakeholders’ platform.

Given the time constraints, I will only mention some other cooperation areas in which our Organization works intensively in order to mitigate the negative effects of the pandemic.

Keeping the flow of **Regional Trade and Exchanges** is another area, as they are indispensable prerequisites in this regard. Setting up an “*Information Exchange Mechanism*” on trade and economic issues in the BSEC Region and adoption of a “*Framework for BSEC E-commerce Cooperation*” are under active consideration.

In the field of **Healthcare and Pharmaceuticals**, we work for a “*Network for the Emergency Preparedness and Response within the BSEC Region*”, with the aim to ensure the exchange of information on health threats, in real time, between the Member States, and for the implementation of the “*Agreement on cooperation in the sphere of quality, effectiveness and safety assurance of medicines*”. We are also working on finalizing the “*Agreement on Cooperation in the Field of Sanitary Protection of the Territories of the BSEC Member States*”.

In the area of **Emergency Assistance**, we focus on implementing the “*Agreement among the Governments of the BSEC Member States on Collaboration in Emergency Assistance and Emergency Response to Natural and Man-made Disasters*”.

Two High Level Conferences were organized for the BSEC Member States in order to discuss ways and means to intensify the regional cooperation for the implementation of the SDGs and for meeting the new challenges created by the economic and social impact of the COVID-19 pandemic.

A largely shared view was that no country can implement the SDGs alone and that real progress could be realized by both national action and regional

cooperation. In this regard, emphasis was put on the essential role BSEC can play in supporting the Member States to create the necessary policy framework and harmonize their action for sustainable economic development and for achieving the SDGs.

While we try to adapt our work to the requirements of these challenging times, there are still many unknown effects of the pandemic on the economy. Forecasts estimated for the Black Sea region a negative economic growth with a contraction of GDP around -4.7% in 2020.

Economic recovery requires common and coordinated actions, and this is what our Organization endeavours to do for its Member States.