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-BSEC at 30-

Year 2022 will be a special one for the Black Sea Economic Cooperation Organization (BSEC), as we will celebrate its 30th Anniversary. Indeed, on 25 June 1992, the Heads of State/Government of eleven countries, meeting in Istanbul, signed *the Declaration on Black Sea Economic Cooperation*. Later on, in 1999, BSEC was transformed into a fully-fledged international organization with the entry into force in that year of the BSEC Charter.

BSEC now brings together 13 States from both within and around the Black Sea region, namely Albania, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Bulgaria, Georgia, Greece, Republic of Moldova, Republic of North Macedonia, Romania, the Russian Federation, Serbia, Turkey and Ukraine – we are referring in our documents to “the wider Black Sea area” or “BSEC Region.

Thirty years of existence are a relatively long time for any international organization, even more so, for one that activates in a very complex region like ours and the membership of which is in itself a “microcosm” as far as it includes States which are also Members of the EU, others that are Members of the Eurasian Economic Union and others still that are in the midst of accession procedures to one or the other. In addition to that, BSEC is covering an area of paramount geostrategic importance: it actually forms the bridge between Europe and Asia, while at the same time



it is a significant energy hub and a vital transportation crossroad between North-South and East-West.

And yet, despite this sometimes challenging mixture, BSEC is now the oldest organization in the region and, more importantly, it has evolved into becoming the most representative and institutionally mature regional economic organization in the wider Black Sea area. It is an economic organization, but the definition of economic given by our Charter is very wide indeed, covering areas such as economic development, customs and SMEs, trade and services, transport, agriculture, energy, environment, tourism, culture, education, science and technology and even good governance, emergency assistance and combatting organized crime; the list is not exhaustive.

The concrete achievements that have been so far registered in all these areas have certainly enhanced the relevance of BSEC.

First, for almost 30 years it has been able to gather around a table, many times during a year, representatives from all Member States in order to discuss and promote projects of benefit to all; so, apart from a vehicle promoting dialogue and understanding, the BSEC Organization could also be viewed as a very useful and necessary, first-level, confidence building mechanism.

Second, BSEC provides an effective decision-making framework through the adoption of political declarations, which set general objectives for the enhancement of regional cooperation and through the development of legal instruments – Memoranda of Understanding or Agreements – which provide specific goals and mechanisms for the achievement of these objectives. The BSEC Economic Agenda, endorsed by the Heads of State and Government of our Member States, in 2012, is of a strategic nature,



containing specific targets in all areas of sectoral cooperation and a practical road-map for their effective implementation.

Third, the Black Sea Economic Cooperation has been intensively working towards trade facilitation and investment promotion through, inter alia, development of transport infrastructure in the Region, efforts aimed at harmonizing and simplifying procedures, introduction of more automation and digitalization in the procedures concerning the transport of goods and services. Projects as the «*BSEC PERMIT System*», the e-PERMIT and the “Framework for BSEC E-commerce Cooperation” proved most useful, especially during the Covid-19 pandemic. Other, like “Trade Facilitation Strategy for the BSEC Region” and the “Framework for BSEC Single Window Cooperation” are practically finalised and hopefully would soon be formally adopted.

Fourth, BSEC has been engaged in projects management. Since 2003, the BSEC Project Development Fund, has helped tens of projects at their initial stage of development. Similarly, since 2016, several projects have been implemented or initiated via the Black Sea Project Promotion Facility established through a generous contribution by the Russian Federation. On the other hand the intensive cooperation with the European Union brought many important projects for the benefit of all Member States.

Fifth, mention deserves to be made of the important contribution of and close cooperation with the BSEC related bodies (PABSEC, BSTDB, ICBSS, BSUN and BS Business Council) have brought to the promotion of BSEC objectives.

Last but not least, the participation of the Observers and Sectoral Dialogue Partners and their contribution to the activities of BSEC have brought important benefits to the Organization. On the other hand, the fact



that a significant number of countries and regional international organizations have requested and been granted such a status and are actively interacting with BSEC is a clear proof of the relevance of BSEC.

So, there will be reasons for celebration next year. The 30th Anniversary of BSEC will at the same time offer a most appropriate and actually a needed opportunity for evaluating what has been achieved so far and, on this basis, for defining the priorities and activity of BSEC for the years to come and thus further increase the assertiveness and the role of BSEC as a catalyzer of economic cooperation and development in the region.

In this context and given that the Russian Federation will hold the Chairmanship in Office of the BSEC during the second half of next year, I visited Moscow on 8-10 December 2021, upon the kind invitation by HE Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov. Our discussions on that occasion, of which I was particularly satisfied, were concentrated precisely on the ways in which BSEC and the efficiency of its activity could be further enhanced. I felt as a duty of mine to also express, on that occasion, to my distinguished host, my particular appreciation with regard to the most valuable and active contribution and support of the Russian Federation to BSEC. The Russian active and substantive participation in the works of all BSEC subsidiary and related bodies, the coordination by the Russian Federation of several BSEC Working groups, its important initiatives such as the BSEC Project Promotion Facility, are just some of the most relevant examples in this respect.

As to the 30th Anniversary of BSEC and its future activity and priorities, several aspects have been touched upon and jointly identified as areas where adaptations and improvements are needed. The organization



of a BSEC Summit and the adoption there by of a substantive and forward looking document - a Declaration- setting the objectives and priorities for the years to come are a necessity. It goes by itself, for example, that the BSEC Economic Agenda, adopted in 2012, necessarily requires to be revised and adapted to the new realities and trends in the global economy, including lessons learned from the COVID19 pandemics, climate change and environment protection or digitalisation.

There is also need for a longer term approach when it comes to establishing projects and priorities as it is for a stronger project-oriented dimension of the whole activity of BSEC.

Need would be there, at the same time, to avoid politicising the activity of the BSEC and therefore to concentrate it on the key objective BSEC has been established for: economic development of the countries in the region through the enhancement of cooperation among them. That also requires a revived and much stronger role of the BSEC Business Council.

Besides the abovementioned lines of action, I would add some personal considerations on further possible improvements especially with regard to the working methods of BSEC. These considerations derive including from what I experienced and could assess on the almost six months since I took over as BSEC PERMIS Secretary General.

First, I am of the view that securing a much needed longer term approach within our Organization, could be helped if the duration of the BSEC CIO were extended to one year, and that in association with the enhancement of the role of the BSEC Troika.

Second, there is need for raising the level of representation by the Member States, in the CSO and other subsidiary bodies or working groups



so as to enhance the quality of deliberations and the ability to advance proposals and shape decisions there upon.

Third, there would be added value in increasing interaction with Observers and Sectoral Dialogue Partners. The benefits this interaction would bring to BSEC and its Member States should be the only condition for granting/renewing the status of observer or partner.

I very much welcome the fact that in its meeting of December 17, 2021, the Council of the Ministers of Foreign Affairs of BSEC Member States set the course for the preparations of the 30th Anniversary of BSEC. I am confident that ideas like those above and others that may be brought forward in the forthcoming months will offer the appropriate background for the adoption by the projected Anniversary Summit of decisions that will further consolidate the BSEC as a most relevant regional organization.

