

**Joint Athens Declaration of the Ministers Responsible for
Education of the BSEC Member States on Cooperation
in Higher Education and University Research**

We, the Ministers Responsible for Education of the BSEC Member States, gathered on the occasion of the establishment of the BSEC Working Group on Education, in Athens, 29 September 2005:

- **Emphasizing** the importance of education as a vital component towards political, economic and cultural cooperation in the Black Sea Region;
- **Recognizing** that educational systems positively contribute to further bilateral and multilateral cooperation;
- **Considering** that education and training play a key role in the European integration process and respond to the new challenges of globalization;
- **Confirming** our determination to preserve and maintain the democratic principles and rights for both current and future generations;
- **Noting** the important efforts of our countries and their progress in reforming education, promoting university research and technological development;
- **Recognizing** the fundamental role of higher education in preparing citizens and future decision makers who will respect and preserve their heritage, cultural richness, linguistic diversity and thus strengthen the basis of knowledge in the region;
- **Bearing** in mind that Research is an integral part of Higher Education;
- **Recognizing** the role of university research as a fundamental factor in quality assurance of education including innovation and technological transfer; which contributes to economic development and the quality of life;
- **Being aware** of the importance of providing the appropriate measures in order to put into practice the provisions of the current Declaration;
- **Taking into consideration:**
 - The BSEC Economic Agenda for the Future: Towards a More Consolidated, Effective and Viable BSEC Partnership, adopted by the Council of Ministers of Foreign Affairs in Moscow on 27 April 2001;
 - The Istanbul Decennial Summit Declaration adopted on 25 June 2002;
 - The Joint Baky Declaration of the BSEC Ministers of Education, adopted on 16 April 2004;
 - The Resolution for the establishment of the BSEC Working Group on Education, adopted by the 12th Meeting of the Council of Ministers of Foreign Affairs of the BSEC Member States (Komotini, 23 April 2005) ;
 - The Bergen Communiqué (Bergen, 19-20 May 2005);
 - The relevant documents of The Council of Europe, UNESCO, OECD and the European Commission.

Declare that the BSEC Member States attach great importance to Education in general and specifically to Higher Education and University Research along the lines of the Bologna Process. Higher Education institutions and student organizations will be our partners in this process.

In this respect we have the intention to:

- **Cooperate** in the development of national frameworks of qualifications in order to secure compatibility of the educational systems in the BSEC region.
- **Seek to create** a network and a web-site, which will be updated systematically with all the necessary reforms and innovative practices by each and every BSEC Member State, and which will provide us with wider possibilities for unrestricted information and the exchange of experience in the fields of our interest.
- **Agree** upon standards, procedures and guidelines on quality assurance and when necessary review the existing systems in the respective countries; as well as take into consideration the standards for the European Higher Education Area.
- **Stimulate** Higher Education Institutions to develop study programs inspired by education for democratic citizenship and intercultural education by introducing respect for human rights and diversity.
- **Investigate** the possibility of elaborating joint programs between Universities and Institutions of Higher Education in accordance with the laws and regulations existing in each country.
- **Encourage** the mobility of students, academic staff and researchers across the BSEC region, within the framework of appropriate programs.
- **Support** Lifelong Learning through the development of training programs elaborated in Universities and Higher Education Institutions.
- **Promote** joint research programs between the Universities and Institutions of the BSEC Member States in compliance with their priorities. Moreover, we underline the necessity of encouraging research which focuses on social learning in order to meet the need of “learning to live together”.

We have agreed upon the above in order to further enhance cooperation in the fields of Higher Education and Research and state that it is necessary to develop also cooperation in the field of general secondary education, vocational education and training and post-university education in our region.

We express our gratitude to the host country for the excellent arrangements and hospitality.

Adopted in Athens on 29 September 2005.