



Balkans & Black Sea Cooperation Forum

Friday June 1st

Forum Declaration 2018

“Rail, Road, Rivers Connectivity to the EU via Balkan region”

We, the participants of the second edition of the Balkans & Black Sea Cooperation Forum, held in the city of Athens, Greece, from May 30th to June 1st 2018, express our willingness and readiness to actively promote the Balkan and Black Sea region as a pivotal transportation hub and crossroads by accelerating **sustainable connectivity** as a key driver to strengthen the regional economic development for the benefit of all people in this region and its collaborators without any discrimination and in line with the international human rights and gender equality standards.

The mobility of services, goods and people in a flexible and sustainable manner constitutes a significant factor for growth and economic development. A transport system that is resilient, resource efficient, climate- and environmentally-friendly, safe for all citizens, the economy and society, may contribute to increased competitiveness, business opportunities and investments.

The countries of the Balkan and Black Sea region are interconnected through an extensive road, rail, air and maritime (sea and rivers) transport network. The region is the **interconnector** between three continents: Europe, Asia and Africa. At a time when efforts to improve connectivity between the three continents gain everyday more in interest and commitments, the significance of the Balkan and Black Sea region increases considerably. Since the economic growth of the region is widely affected by trade and tourism, the development and the modernization of this network is of particular importance for each country to invest in at national level and at the same time constitutes a goal for the **collective cooperation** of the Balkan and Black Sea countries.

In particular, inadequate infrastructures, in combination with institutional, regulatory and economic barriers, affect the unobstructed operation of international transport in and through the Balkan and Black Sea region. If remained unaddressed, challenges will become a serious barrier to both governments and the business community, for the development of international trade and the integration of national economies in the global economy.

To this end, the implementation of targeted actions and the adoption of result-oriented policies, which should be met by all transport modes in the region, including maritime, air, road and rail transport, is imperative in order to eliminate bottlenecks and facilitate the development of a seamless inter-modal transports network connecting continents, state and regions meeting economic and social demands and to ensure the free movement of people, goods and knowledge in line with international standards.

Challenges for policy shapers and business makers:

- **Policy challenges:** improvement of the regulatory framework; harmonization of the national legislation, data protection, exchange of information, facilitating visa procedures; facilitating the movement of goods, people and services across national boundaries, promoting more collectively the region towards stakeholders located outside the region (e.g. stimulate awareness in China of EU flagship projects).
- **Research and development:** digitization of transport; development of new services and tailored-made applications; single-window facility; lack of adequate infrastructure.



- **Capacity building:** employment opportunities; access to new processes; investing in people and skills to eradicate digital exclusion; especially of groups vulnerable to exclusion (e.g. women, elderly, low-income).

Therefore, the objectives of the present Forum Declaration 2018 are *a)* to stimulate further inter- and intra-regional cooperation among all relevant stakeholders, policy –makers, entrepreneurs, the academia, and civil society and, *b)* to raise awareness and motivate social responsibility with the aim to contribute to the creation of a **Roadmap for inclusive transport system in the Balkans and Black Sea region**” for accelerating the implementation of the interconnectivity of maritime, air, rail, road and river in the region from a connectivity platform to a connectivity strategy with focus on:

- (1) increasing awareness and communication with neighbouring regions, such as Europe, South East Asia, the Mediterranean, China, Japan, regarding the need to develop, set and apply a broader integration policy following the principles of the 2030 Agenda;
- (2) drafting a proposal for a) *upgrading* existing transport infrastructure: ports, airports, highways, railways e.g. High Speed Rail and b) *deploying* Belt and Road Initiatives crossing this region e.g. utilizing better the Maritime Silk Road with Port of Piraeus as fastest growing port in container traffic and its rail connection to central and north Europe and c) *establishing* alternatives routes for interregional trade which have the capacity to handle more volumes in an accelerated tempo than existing northern routes e.g. potential alternative route is a high speed rail between China and Europe via Kazakhstan-Caspian Sea-Azerbaijan-Georgia-Black Sea-Romania and vice versa;
- (3) creating favourable conditions for attracting foreign and national investments, and identifying additional funding mechanisms targeting the Balkans and the Black Sea region.

Our aim is to contribute to the establishment of an optimal framework for the facilitation of an efficient and inclusive transport system to meet the economic, social and environmental needs of the Balkans and Black Sea region, in order to reduce regional disparities and to meet the citizens’ needs. We encourage all organizations and companies to adopt and integrate UN Women’s Empowerment Principles. Therefore, this Forum Declaration will be sent to more than **30 influential** organizations and stakeholders in policy shaping and business making in and for this region. BBSF will expect their reaction with the aim to create a dedicated community working towards the elaboration of the Roadmap.

We express our gratitude and appreciation to the hosts and organizers of the second **Balkans & Black Sea Cooperation Forum** for their hospitality and excellent organization of the events and renew our promise to continue working together to promote connectivity in a manner meeting our mutual expectations – increasing sustainability, performance and quality of life. It’s about **leadership, economics and synergies**.

June 1st 2018, Athens | Greece

Attribution of Authorship, May 2018

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List of addressees (not limited)

- President European Council
- President European Commission
- President European Parliament
- Presidents, Ministers of MFA and Ministers of Transport of EU, EU Candidate countries, Black Sea countries, China, Japan, US and UK.
- President of Black Sea Economic Cooperation
- Chairperson-in-office Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe
- Secretary General Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe
- Presidents and Managing Directors Strategic Dialogue Partners Expertise Partners of BBSF,
- Black Sea Trade and Development Bank
- Parliamentary Assembly of the BSEC
- BSEC Business Council
- Union of Road Transport Associations in the Black Sea Economic Cooperation Region – BSEC URTA
- International Black Sea Region Association of Ship-owners (BINSAs)
- Balkan and Black Sea Commission, Conference of Peripheral Maritime Regions- CPMR
- European Network of Maritime Clusters
- European Institute for EurAsian Dialogue – EIEAD
- Greek-Eurasian Business Council – GEBC
- European Committee of the Regions
- International Union of Railways
- TRACECA
- International Road Federation
- World Customs Organisation
- Euro-Asian Transport linkages
- Trans European Network Transport
- United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE)



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- Regional Cooperation Council (RCC)
 - Central European Initiative (CEI)
 - Silk Road Chamber of International Commerce (SRCIC)
 - European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD)
 - European Investment Bank (EIB)
 - World Bank (WB)
 - Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB)
 - Trade and Investment agencies in related countries
 - Federations of industries and companies in related countries