



ORGANIZATION OF THE BLACK SEA ECONOMIC COOPERATION

Permanent International Secretariat

PRESS RELEASE ON THE FIRST EDITION OF THE “BALKAN AND BLACK SEA COOPERATION FORUM”

(Serres, Hellenic Republic, 25-26 May 2017)

The first edition of the “*Balkan and Black Sea Cooperation Forum*” took place in Serres, Hellenic Republic, on 25-26 May 2017 with the aim to foster cross-border cooperation and help take advantage of the untapped potential for business and trade in the broader region.

The BSEC PERMIS supported the initiative by becoming an official partner, seeing this effort as a welcome new opportunity for promoting economic cooperation and useful networking among interested stakeholders. Among the strategic partners of the event were the *Black Sea Trade and Development Bank* (BSTDB), the *Conference of Peripheral Maritime Regions* (CPMR), the Municipality of Serres and the *European Banking Federation*.

More than 200 participants from the governmental, non-governmental and public sector offered proposals for the most effective enhancement of regional cooperation and had the opportunity to exchange views on the prevailing trends of the emerging new global framework, the effective promotion of the 2030 Sustainable Development Goals (SDG), the role and influence of the European Union and that of other international initiatives affecting developments in the region, such as the “*One Belt - One Road*” initiative.

The BSEC PERMIS Secretary General, Ambassador Michael B. CHRISTIDES, addressed as a keynote speaker the first panel of the forum titled “*EU, Balkans, Black Sea Perspectives and Sustainable Development Goals 2030*”.

In his intervention, Ambassador CHRISTIDES noted the role of the BSEC Organization as the oldest and, institutionally, mature regional entity promoting mainly economic cooperation among its 12 Member States and beyond. For 25 years now, the Organization has established a culture of dialog and understanding, it has implemented many projects in many sectors, it has established useful networks among state and private institutions, in a nutshell: it has offered a lot to the wider region of the Black Sea in what concerns cooperation and coordination among States. The Secretary General of the BSEC PERMIS underlined that the BSEC Organization will continue to provide its own specific contribution to regional cooperation in the wider Black Sea region. Concluding, he expressed his appreciation for this new initiative and pledged BSEC support for the successful continuation of its activities.

The plan of the initiators is to hold the Forum annually in a different city of the Balkan and Black Sea region States. Every year a Call for Expression of Interest to become the Host City and County will be made public.

At the end of the two-day event participants adopted the “*Forum Declaration 2017 - Cultural Tourism, a Key to Sustainable Development*”.