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BSEC ministers' meeting stresses need to be proactive

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The Black Sea Economic Cooperation, or BSEC, needs to be proactive in addressing the challenges of the evolving international environment was among the conclusions drawn up Thursday at the 19th meeting of the Council of Foreign Affairs Ministers of BSEC member countries in Tirana, Albania. The meeting was hosted by Albanian Minister of Foreign Affairs Lulzim Basha.

BSEC members emphasized that they see the organization "as an actor for promoting peace, stability and prosperity in the wider Black Sea area" while disputes or conflicts impeded cooperation and needed to be settled on the basis of generally recognized principles and rules of international law.

The conclusions also stressed that effective regional cooperation through BSEC structures and mechanisms promotes economic and social development to the benefit of the countries and peoples of the wider Black Sea area and contributes to the building of confidence in the region.

Additionally it was recognized that further constructive steps are needed to enhance the decision-making mechanism and the effective implementation of the decisions adopted in the BSEC framework and to increase BSEC's effectiveness and visibility;

In speaking at the meeting, Turkish Foreign Minister Ali Babacan urged that all the states that were members of BSEC should exert more effort so that it could be a more effective organization. He emphasized that the member states had cooperated with each other and had therefore created the positive atmosphere for the BSEC meeting. He noted that Turkey was giving importance to BSEC in its policies. All member countries would benefit from cooperation and should ensure that the private sector had a place in their initiatives. Babacan also expressed his satisfaction that the guidelines for a more efficient BSEC had been adopted as the Minister had started the initiative in a letter last April to BSEC.

BSEC Secretary General Ambassador Leonidas Chrysanthopoulos addressed the matter of the ongoing global financial crisis calling it "an issue of concern for all of us." He called on BSEC member states to safeguard their financial institutions so that economic development in the BSEC region is not impeded and for those that had taken measures to share that information with those states not yet affected at the same level. A working group on banking and finance is expected to meet next month to assess the situation.

Referring to the crisis that affected the Black Sea region in August, Chrysanthopoulos characterized that situation as a test. "If BSEC is to continue progressing, it is indispensable that we continue keeping bilateral tensions or crises of the regions, outside of BSEC, which must continue focusing on its economic cooperation. We must assure that the economic infrastructure projects of our Organization, are not negatively affected by such crises. I have in mind our biggest project to date, the Black Sea Ring Highway project. With the political will of the Council the BSEC cooperation process should continue to develop steadily without interruption of any kind."

Chrysanthopoulos added, "The Secretariat is doing everything possible in helping consolidating BSEC as a project-based result-oriented organization, in enhancing BSEC-EU relations, in promoting BSEC to its people through the international mass media and in helping the Chairman-in-Office and the Member States. With our new website, our new portal and our new communication system, which is a result of the voluntary contribution of the Hellenic Republic, for which we are grateful, the operational capability of the

Secretariat has greatly improved to the benefit of our organization. And we will continue in that direction.”

BSEC stresses maritime links, EU ties:

Note was taken of cooperation between BSEC and the European Union and the willingness to further promote BSEC-EU interaction and implement projects and programs. Tribute was paid to the concerted actions of states that are both BSEC and EU members to “facilitate, within the EU, the implementation of the Black Sea Synergy with BSEC as its main partner through concrete projects and other activities.”

BSEC has highlighted the importance of developing stronger maritime transport links among the ports of the BSEC region, contributing to the development of transport infrastructure and creating favorable conditions for business cooperation. In addition it stressed the importance of cooperating to protect and rehabilitate the Black Sea marine environment.

At the conclusion of the meeting, a ceremony was held during which where Albania handed over the Chairmanship-in-Office of BSEC to Armenia for the next six-month period.

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