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**PRESS RELEASE**  
**ON THE 25th MEETING OF**  
**THE COUNCIL OF MINISTERS OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS**  
**OF THE ORGANIZATION OF THE BLACK SEA ECONOMIC COOPERATION**  
**(Moscow, 16 December 2011)**

The 25th Meeting of the Council of Ministers of Foreign Affairs of the Organization of the Black Sea Economic Cooperation (BSEC) was held on 16 December 2011, in Moscow. The meeting was chaired by His Excellency Mr. Sergey LAVROV, Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation, in his capacity as the Chairman-in-Office of the Organization.

The representatives of the BSEC Member States<sup>1</sup>, as well as Related Bodies<sup>2</sup>, BSEC Observers<sup>3</sup>, Sectoral Dialogue Partners<sup>4</sup> and other guests participated in and delivered statements at the meeting.

In the working session of the meeting, the Ministers exchanged views on issues of common concern to the region. They highlighted the need to continue ongoing efforts to further increase the efficiency, effectiveness, visibility, institutional capacity and human resources of BSEC, its Permanent International Secretariat and Related Bodies. With the 20th anniversary of BSEC approaching, to render its work relevant to the peoples of the Member States, it was emphasized that the Organization should identify and implement more projects which can contribute in a concrete way to sustainable development at the national and regional levels. The importance of fully realizing the flagship transport projects of BSEC, namely the Black Sea Ring Highway project

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<sup>1</sup> The 12 BSEC Member States are Albania, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Bulgaria, Georgia, Greece, Moldova, Romania, the Russian Federation, Serbia, Turkey and Ukraine.

<sup>2</sup> The Parliamentary Assembly of the BSEC (PABSEC), the BSEC Business Council (BSEC BC), the Black Sea Trade and Development Bank (BSTDB) and the International Center for Black Sea Studies (ICBSS) are the four Related Bodies of BSEC.

<sup>3</sup> Austria, Belarus, Croatia, Czech Republic, Egypt, France, Israel, Italy, Poland, Slovak Republic, Tunisia, USA, International Black Sea Club, Energy Charter Secretariat, Black Sea Commission and the Commission of the European Communities have Observer status in BSEC.

<sup>4</sup> Hungary, Iran, Jordan, Montenegro, UK, Japan, Republic of Slovenia, Republic of Korea, Black Sea International Shipowners Association (BINSAs), Black and Azov Seas Ports Association (BASPA), Black Sea Region Association of Shipbuilders and Shiprepairers (BRASS), Danube Commission, International Network for SMEs (INSME), Regional Commonwealth in the Field of Communications (RCC) and the Black Sea Universities Network (BSUN) have Sectoral Dialogue Partnership status in BSEC.

and the project on the development of the Motorways of the Sea in the BSEC Region, was also reiterated, as these projects are expected to bring the countries of the region closer together and to have a positive impact on their economies through contributing to the increase of trade and investments. The need to fully tap on the cooperation potential with Observers and Sectoral Partners of BSEC was also underlined.

During its meeting, the Council endorsed the draft Agreement on Cooperation in the Field of Sanitary Protection of the Territories of the BSEC Member States and invited the Member States, wishing to join the Agreement, to start the internal procedures necessary for its signing.

The Council extended the term of implementation of the Pilot Project on the Issuing of the BSEC Transit Permit for Trucks, which was launched in 2010 with the participation of seven Member States, for one more year as of 1 February 2012.

Some of the items on the agenda of the meeting in Moscow were related to the implementation of the BSEC Budget, the ongoing work on the updating of the BSEC Economic Agenda for the Future, the conclusions of the International Conference "20 Years of BSEC at a Glance: Outcomes and Perspectives" which was organized in Moscow on 13 December 2011, appointments in the BSEC Permanent International Secretariat, the use of the BSEC Project Development Fund and BSEC Hellenic Development Fund for projects of regional impact, the appointment of Country-Coordinators for some of the BSEC Working Groups, the review of the cooperation among the Member States, the status of implementation of BSEC Council Resolutions, Decisions and Recommendations and the assessment of the activities of the Permanent International Secretariat as well as the Related Bodies of BSEC. During its Moscow meeting, the BSEC Council of Ministers of Foreign Affairs also decided to renew the Observer and Sectoral Dialogue Partnership status of various countries and organizations.

At the conclusion of the meeting, a ceremony took place whereby the Russian Federation handed over the Chairmanship-in-Office of BSEC to the Republic of Serbia. Serbia will officially assume the Chairmanship as of 1 January 2012, for a period of six months until 30 June 2012.

During its Chairmanship, the Russian Federation implemented a calendar of events which covered various areas of cooperation. In addition to the 25th Meeting of the Council of Ministers of Foreign Affairs, the high level events included an informal meeting of the Ministers of Foreign Affairs on the sidelines of the United Nations General Assembly general debate (New York, 25 September 2011) and sectoral ministerial meetings in the areas of agriculture, transport and emergency situations. All three sectoral ministerial events produced joint declarations, containing important decisions.

The joint declaration issued following the first ever Meeting of the BSEC Ministers of Agriculture (Moscow, 7 October 2011) envisages a review of the opportunities for the simplification of export and import procedures for agricultural products among the BSEC Member States, which can be a crucial factor for the transport of fresh fruits and vegetables where delays can easily lead to the decay and spoiling of the goods.

The declaration of the Ministers of Transport (Moscow, 7 October 2011) includes the decision to intensify efforts to improve road, navigation and flight safety in the region, as well as to modernize the fleet of vehicles, vessels and aircrafts in order to reduce their harmful effects on the environment. The Transport Ministers also welcomed the Russian initiative concerning the development of Black Sea Ferry and Passenger lines.

The joint declaration adopted by the Ministers for Emergency Situations and the Heads of the Emergency Services (Sochi, 21 October 2011), on the other hand, includes a proposal for the establishment of an Ad Hoc Working Group on Massive Forest Fires and an Ad Hoc Working

Group on Floods and Torrents within BSEC, under the BSEC Working Group on Cooperation in Emergency Assistance.

Apart from these Ministerial events, many Working Group meetings, workshops and other events in different spheres of cooperation have also been organized during the Russian Chairmanship.

Revising and updating the BSEC Economic Agenda for the Future, which was adopted back in 2001, was one of the priorities of the Russian Chairmanship-in-Office. In this context, the Ad Hoc Group of Experts on the BSEC Economic Agenda for the Future, which has been specially established by the BSEC Council of Ministers of Foreign Affairs in Bucharest, on 8 June 2011, to undertake this very important exercise, held its first meeting during the Russian Chairmanship on 7-8 December 2011, in Istanbul.

In this connection, also an International Conference titled “Twenty Years of the BSEC at a Glance: Outcomes and Perspectives” was organized by the Russian Chairmanship-in-Office (Moscow, 13 December 2011) where the BSEC Member States exchanged views regarding their vision for the future of BSEC.

Another event of the Chairmanship was the International Conference “Seismic Safety of the Countries of the Black Sea Region” (Rostov-on-Don, 28-29 November 2011) where the participants proposed to establish the International Seismic Safety Association on the basis of the Southern Scientific Center of the Russian Academy of Sciences in Rostov-on-Don.

#### **Background Information:**

BSEC was launched as a regionally owned initiative, with Turkey’s lead, on 25 June 1992 at the Istanbul Summit, at a time when regional cooperation was most needed in the transformation process that the countries of the region were undergoing. The idea that stronger economic cooperation among the Black Sea countries would enhance peace and stability in the region was the underlying philosophy behind BSEC.

With the entry into force of its Charter in 1999, BSEC was officially transformed from an initiative into a regional cooperation organization.

Today, BSEC serves as a forum for cooperation in a wide range of areas and a platform for political dialogue for its 12 Member States. The BSEC countries encompass an area of approximately 20 million square kilometers with 340 million people. Transport, environmental protection, trade and economic development, energy, migration management, combating organized crime, communications and information technology, science and technology, healthcare and pharmaceuticals, institutional renewal and good governance, education, culture, tourism and customs matters are among the most active fields of cooperation within the framework of the Organization.

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