

**RHODOS DECLARATION
OF THE MINISTERS OF TOURISM
OF THE MEMBER STATES OF
THE ORGANIZATION OF THE BLACK SEA ECONOMIC COOPERATION**

(Rhodos, 31 March 2005)

We, the Ministers in charge of Tourism or Heads of the Tourism Administrations/Delegations of the Member States of the Organization of the Black Sea Economic Cooperation: the Republic of Albania, the Republic of Armenia, the Republic of Azerbaijan, the Republic of Bulgaria, Georgia, the Hellenic Republic, the Republic of Moldova, Romania, the Russian Federation, Serbia and Montenegro, the Republic of Turkey and Ukraine,

Acknowledging the potential role of tourism as a vehicle for development, a platform for peace and stability in the world contributing to mutual understanding, goodwill and close relations among people,

Recognizing the importance of tourism in promoting economic and social development and its role as an effective tool for poverty alleviation,

Recognizing the ultimate role of tourism in protecting and enhancing the natural and cultural heritage leading towards sustainable development,

Reaffirming our strong will to further develop and strengthen the cooperation among our countries in the field of tourism,

Recognizing the importance and significance of visa simplification procedures which could also contribute to the promotion of tourism in the Black Sea region with a view to possible discussion of the issue by relevant authorities of BSEC Member States.

Considering the efforts taken on a permanent basis by the BSEC Member States in the development of cooperation in the field of tourism in the BSEC area,

Being aware of the initiatives taken recently by the European Commission in the field of tourism regarding measures for the future of European tourism as well as the basic orientations for the sustainability of European tourism, which have culminated in the inclusion of tourism in the new Constitutional Treaty of the European Union,

Conscious of the upgrading of the image and the status of tourism worldwide as a result of the transformation of the World Tourism Organization into a Specialized Agency of the United Nations,

Taking stock of the provisions of the Declaration of the Ministers of Tourism and Heads of Delegations of the BSEC Member States adopted in Tirana, on 27 September 2002,

Convinced that the achievement of our common aims and goals can only be realized through the implementation of specific programs and measures,

***Declare* that our cooperation will be guided by the basic principles of sustainable development and will be based on the following principles and actions for the development of tourism in the BSEC area:**

- 1. We reiterate our commitment that our main strategic marketing objective will be to position the BSEC area as a tourism destination to the world tourism market and to stimulate and strengthen the image of our region as a unique and very attractive destination.**
- 2. To this end, special forms of tourism that are common to all BSEC countries, such as cultural tourism, religious tourism, curative tourism, sea tourism, MICE tourism, mountain and winter sports tourism, rural tourism and eco-tourism, etc. should be developed and promoted in distant markets, considering in particular the possibility of developing complementary actions in key international tourist exhibitions and fairs, recalling, among others, the relevant experience at the International Tourist Fair “Philoxenia 2003”, in Thessaloniki.**
- 3. Special attention should be given to our multilateral cooperation and the exchange of good practices and legislation in the field of maritime tourism, including cruises, yachting, etc. Special attention should also be given to the development of cruises as a vehicle for the enhancement of tourism in the BSEC area ensuring its competitiveness respecting international agreements and regulations.**
- 4. Particular emphasis should also be attributed to the establishment of tourist-cultural itineraries in the BSEC area based on preserving the heritage of our countries, as far as culture, history, mythology, architecture, faith, gastronomy, common traditions, etc. are concerned.**

In this respect, particular lessons can be drawn from the exchange of experiences, networking and the development of special interest itineraries as, among others, from the “Silk Road” project initiated by the WTO, the “Argonauts Expedition” initiated by Greece, the regional “Wine Roads” initiated by various BSEC Member States, as well as other projects initiated by the BSEC Member States.

5. **The private tourist sector of our countries has a crucial role to play in offering and promoting joint multi-destination packages spanning as many BSEC Member States as possible on the basis of special characteristics and interests.**
6. **Sports and tourism, in particular, are closely interconnected and major or mega events like the Olympic Games in Athens in 2004 can expand the visibility of the area to international tourism and can create conditions of cultural exchange, social and economic development.**
7. **Our main priority will be to ensure the development of tourism within a broader strategy of sustainable development. Key element in achieving sustainable development in the BSEC area should be the establishment of high quality standards for tourist accommodations and services. The emphasis on quality in tourism is also enhancing the competitiveness of our tourist product in the international markets.**

To this end, we agree to exchange best practices on sustainable development projects.

8. **To support private investments in the sector of tourism in the BSEC area, through improvement of the existing national legal and fiscal frameworks, learning from each other. In this respect, the investment potential of tourism in the BSEC area could be presented in a specially organized international forum.**
9. **Since the SMEs form the backbone of our tourist industry, the search for financial support from domestic and international sources and in particular from the Black Sea Trade and Development Bank (BSTDB) will be in the focus of our future work.**
10. **Networking of research institutes and observatories on tourism in the Black Sea area would be a very useful tool for defining the guidelines for enhancing the sustainable competitiveness of the BSEC tourism industry.**
11. **Local communities and other stakeholders should be involved in all tourism development activities at an early stage to maximize the social and economic benefits in an equitable manner.**
12. **The development of education and training programmes concerning in particular the personnel employed in the public and private tourist sector, the training of trainers and on-the-job training of students and graduates of schools of tourist professions is crucial for upgrading the quality, efficiency and competitiveness in tourism. Therefore, we take note with satisfaction of the programme for training the trainers with two participants from each BSEC country to be organized in Rhodos by the Greek side and we encourage the organization of similar programmes by other BSEC countries.**
13. **It is essential to take advantage of new technologies and upgrade our national tourist websites, profiting from the experience of other BSEC countries that are also members of the European Union or members of the ETC and participate in**

the initiative of the E.U. for the creation of a European Tourist Destinations Portal.

- 14. Mindful that tourism must attain the recognition that it deserves in the BSEC area, we find very interesting the endeavours of the E.U, the WTO and the OECD for the establishment of the “Tourism Satellite Accounts”.**
- 15. In order to achieve the above goals, we share the conviction that the role of the BSEC Working Group on Cooperation in Tourism must be strengthened and expanded to profit from discussions taking place in other BSEC Working Groups on issues linked to tourism.**
- 16. To promote a better interface with the tourism industry and other groups of stakeholders we think appropriate to consider holding a BSEC Tourism Forum, including representatives of the private tourist sector as well as of the national and regional authorities responsible for tourism. Discussions would focus on one or two subjects of priority to the Industry and the periodical sessions of this Forum, could take place alternately in each of the BSEC countries.**
- 17. We invite the BSEC WG on Cooperation in Tourism to review regularly, in the framework of the Tourism Action Plan, the implementation of this Declaration.**
- 18. We forward this Declaration to the BSEC Council of Ministers of Foreign Affairs and to the Governments of the BSEC Member States.**
- 19. We agree to meet whenever appropriate, to consider the matters related to tourism cooperation in the BSEC area. The date and the venue of next meeting will be decided in cooperation with BSEC PERMIS.**
- 20. We express our gratitude to the host country for the excellent arrangements provided to all the delegations of the BSEC Member States and BSEC Related Bodies and for its important contribution to the success of this Meeting.**

Adopted in Rhodes, on the 31st of March 2005.