

**STATEMENT
BY THE SECRETARY GENERAL OF THE BSEC PERMIS
AMBASSADOR MICHAEL B. CHRISTIDES
DELIVERED AT THE 9TH INTERNATIONAL BLACK SEA SYMPOSIUM:
“BLUE GROWTH AS A DRIVER FOR REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT”**

(Athens, Greece, 20-21 March 2018)

Ladies and Gentlemen, Dear Friends!

Allow me first of all to thank ICBSS and especially its Director General, Mr. George Mitrakos, for inviting me to this very important event and, of course, congratulate him on the perfect organization of this timely and interesting initiative.

As you might have seen in the Program, I have the honor, and the onus, to deliver a keynote Speech on the “*Blue Growth as a driver for regional development*”.

Now, the first thing I did was to try and find the real meaning, the actual interpretation of the term “*Blue Growth*”. Well, you might not believe it, but the modern-day Vade Mecum, the WIKIPEDIA, doesn’t even carry an entry under this name! Yet I insisted, because colors are so often used in today’s jargon that one has the impression this mania is a last-ditch effort to make our grey and drab reality more attractive and colorful: thus, we have Blue Tech, Green Energy, Red Lines, Blue Growth, Green Economy, not to mention the Beatles’ Yellow Submarine...

In any case, the only enlightenment I was able to find was through GOOGLE, which attributes the term to an “*EU Strategy for supporting sustainable growth in the marine and maritime sectors as a whole*”.

According to the EU, the Seas and Oceans can be the drivers of our economy, they can provide new riches, more employment and can help achieve overall sustainable growth.

I could not agree more with the above: after all, I represent an International Organization that carries the name of a Sea in its official title, while most of the frontiers of our Member States are set by Seas – in fact, six of them: the Black Sea, the Caspian, the Aegean, the Mediterranean, the Ionian and the Adriatic.

Ladies and Gentlemen, Growth was, is and will remain the aim and driving force of us human beings, whether we strive for it individually or in a societal - state framework. Yet, unfortunately, in the name of Growth and Development we humans have committed

serious crimes to the environment, marine or continental; we damaged – and we continue to do so - our own habitat, perhaps to the point of no return.

So, it goes without saying that we have reached a point in “our” Black Sea region where Growth and Development can – and should – only be “*Blue and Sustainable*”, in the sense that we have to consider many more factors, some of which in the past we either chose to ignore, or, simply, we were unable to grasp their potential and long-lasting influence on our surroundings!

For me, ladies and gentlemen, the only way to an effective and sustainable Blue Growth is interaction and coordination among States and Regions: I insist on that, not because I happen to be the Secretary General of a regional Organization promoting economic cooperation among its Member States and beyond, but because I genuinely believe it is imperative to do so, if we wish to be serious in our respective efforts.

After all, and contrary to what many now-a-days whine against Globalization, we can’t escape from the fact – or even hide behind our finger – that globalization is already here – and it is here to stay! It was brought about by Technology, by Science and Innovation and its main effects, i.e. making our world even smaller and inter-related, will only increase, to a point we can’t even imagine today!

So, the sooner we adapt to the new circumstances, the better! But, how can we achieve that, when in most of the countries, even in Europe and North America, the political elite is mostly afraid of Technology and Innovation, remaining hostile to the new ways and means, perhaps because today’s political leaders understand so little about these new “*monsters*”. And, as Innovation progresses every day at an even faster pace, this fear is transformed into an ossified negation, with all the disastrous results we can perceive around us.

So, yes, Mr. Director General, we need to bring into the picture a new generation of stakeholders, as you mention in your kind invitation letter, in order to secure success in our efforts for achieving a sustainable Blue Growth.

We need to motivate young people, we need to adopt new mechanisms, we need to consider the old dangers and confront the new challenges.

Initiatives like today’s Symposium are aiming at the right direction, because they offer the opportunity to the new generation of stakeholders to meet, exchange views and experiences and to jointly formulate policies and good practices that will bring forward

all advantages that the Seas and Oceans can offer for a sustainable Growth of our economies.

Yet, as I said at the beginning, we need to work together, as regions and states, because while legal borders might exist also on the Seas and Oceans, the way we treat our marine environment, the damage we provoke or the unsustainable exploitation of its riches we might engage in, all these affect not only us, but everybody, however far they might be!

The BSEC Organization I have the honour to represent has invested a lot of efforts in compliance with the new realities, by cooperating with different stakeholders, mainly with the EU.

I will not well on details; these will be given to you by my colleague, the responsible Executive Manager of BSEC PERMIS, Mrs. Rositsa STOEVA, later during the day.

Let me only add here that although BSEC has done a lot, we certainly can do more and better; they say that the biggest room of all is the room for improvement! How right they are!

But in order to achieve this improvement, BSEC Member States should increase their sense of ownership for their Organization.

BSEC exists/acts through its Member States, for its Member States. If we forget the first, then we can hardly achieve the second!

In conclusion and in a nutshell:

Yes, the Blue Growth can be the driver for regional development. Yet, regional development, pre-supposes regional cooperation and coordination. If we can achieve that to a higher degree and level as until now, then sustainable development will be the naturel, the only outcome.

I wish to thank the ICBSS for actively supporting the BSEC Organization's efforts to achieve exactly that – and to thank all of you for your patience and your attention.-
