



**STATEMENT**

**On behalf of Black Sea Economic Cooperation Organization  
Permanent International Secretariat  
by First Deputy Secretary General  
Ambassador Ebru BARUTÇU GÖKDENİZLER**

at

**THE UNITED NATIONS INTERNATIONAL OCEAN CONFERENCE**

Lisbon, Portugal, 27 June to 1 July 2022

Honorable co-Presidents of the Conference,  
Honorable Mr. Secretary General,  
Honorable Secretary General of the Conference,  
Your Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is a pleasure for me to be back in Lisbon, where I had the privilege to serve as Ambassador during four memorable years, to address the UN International Ocean Conference on behalf of the BSEC, in the capacity of its First Deputy Secretary General. One cannot think of a better host to mobilize action to save our oceans, as Portugal, renowned for its pioneering navigators who once conquered distant oceans vital to the well-being of our planet that we are today duty bound to protect and nurture. The Organization I represent is fully engaged in doing its share to that end in the Black Sea.

The BSEC, marking its 30<sup>th</sup> Anniversary this year, is a regional organization established with the purpose to promote peace, stability and prosperity in the Black Sea region through economic cooperation among its 13 Member States.

During its existence BSEC developed useful networks among state and private institutions, becoming an important instrument for cooperation and coordination in the wider region of the Black Sea.

Pursuing Sustainable Development is the initial general guideline for action in the “2012 BSEC Economic Agenda: Towards an Enhanced BSEC Partnership”, the strategy document guiding the activities of the Organization, which is currently being updated taking into account the new challenges and opportunities in the global and regional economic environment.

All subsidiary bodies of the BSEC Organization, in their specific areas of competence are actively exploring and engaged in the contribution BSEC can offer, through regional cooperation, to the achievement of the UN SDG's, including of course the implementation of the SDG14 which relates directly to, as our name implies, our very *raison d'être*.

The BSEC Economic Agenda, places the protection of the Black Sea at the center of its priority areas of action under many of its Goal headings, namely Environment Protection and Conservation, Establishment of an Efficient, Sustainable and Safe Transport Network, Strengthening Regional Cooperation in Scientific Research and Technology, Development of Tourism and Protection of Cultural Heritage, and several others that indirectly impact the Black Sea, such as, Sustainable Energy and Development of the Black Sea Energy Market, Food Security and Safety, Support for the Sustainable Development of the SME Sector.

This activity is supported by the Member States, through the respective BSEC Working Groups, through BSEC – EU dialogue and through the cooperation with other international organizations, most notably WB, FAO and UNDP.

As the triple planetary crisis devastating our planet, namely climate change, the biodiversity crisis and pollution, are having a greater impact on the oceans, BSEC has also adjusted its activities to target them all through differentiated activities.

Allow me to briefly highlight our efforts to protect the marine environment and prevent the further environmental degradation of the troubled Black Sea. Troubled unfortunately because it is recognized as one of the most polluted seas of the globe as an almost closed sea fed by four major rivers (the Kuban, the Don, the Dnieper, the Dniester and the Danube) with anoxic waters below 200 meters.

Troubled also because of the current grave conflict in the region that has caused massive loss of innocent lives, immense human suffering, colossal material destruction and serious marine life loss, and that clearly does not bode well with the ideals and objectives of the Organization.

As regards to our efforts, in April 2012 and December 2017, BSEC adopted respectively the “Joint Belgrade Declaration on Climate Change and Green Economy”, and the “BSEC Climate Change Adaptation Strategy for the Black Sea”, to develop regional approaches on climate change measures with respect to the capabilities of the countries.

The endorsement of the Common Maritime Agenda (CMA) for the Black Sea by the riparian countries in May 2019, generated a new dynamic in the region by established a platform for the preservation and restoration of the environment of the Black Sea, for the development of blue and green economies and building a greener and more environmentally friendly transport system. Both the CMA and the Strategic Research and Innovation Agenda (SRIA) identify climate change mitigation and clean energy transition as key avenues for action in the Black Sea region.

The vast majority of the projects being implemented by the BSEC PERMIS and financed by the EU Commission and other international organizations and institutions in fact target marine litter and plastics at sea, the adverse impact of climate change, the promotion of research and innovation and connectivity in the Black Sea. Worth mention in particular in this respect are the following projects:

- 1) The **“Black Sea CONNECT”** - A Blue Growth Initiative for Research and Innovation in the Black Sea promoting a shared vision for a productive, healthy, resilient and sustainable Black Sea by 2030. The initiative will help to deeper connect Black Sea societies through a bridge of new knowledge, technologies and services. The initiative aims to foster human and infrastructure capacity building in coastal, marine and maritime sectors in order to unlock unique opportunities for a sustainable and environmentally friendly blue growth in the Black Sea;
- 2) The **“Black Sea Virtual Knowledge Centre” (BSVKC)**, hosted on the BSEC PERMIS website and financed with the support of the EU Commission, provides a centralized digital repository of information on the Blue Economy in the Black Sea to disseminate information and improve the synergies between maritime stakeholders and Blue Economy related projects in the region.  
(<http://www.bsec-bsvkc.org>)

There are three projects funded by a direct Grant from the EU DG NEAR, related to environmental protection, transport and youth entrepreneurship.

- 1) **“BRIDGE: Advancing Black Sea Research and Innovation to Co-Develop Blue Growth within Resilient Ecosystems”**: aims to create a connected Black Sea community and to develop tools and capabilities necessary to understand and predict the impacts of climate-driven and anthropogenic multi-stressors on the services stemming from Black Sea ecosystems. These services and their responses to stressors will be mapped, monitored and modelled in order to identify a safe operating space within which a sustainable Blue Economy can flourish.

- 2) **“Climate Resilient Regions through Systemic Solutions and Innovations - ARSINOE”**: aims to identify the solutions needed for a successful transformation towards a climate-resilient future, and
- 3) **“Large scale RESToration of COASTal ecosystems through rivers to sea connectivity – REST-COAST”**: a project with 37 other international organizations and institutions from 11 countries, aims to demonstrate to what extent up scaled coastal restoration can provide a low-carbon adaptation, reducing risks and providing gains in biodiversity for vulnerable coastal ecosystems, such as wetlands or seagrass beds.

Last but not least, in cooperation with the World Bank, the BSEC PERMIS will be the official implementing agency of a Global Environment Facility (GEF) funded project valued at 6.4 million USD aiming at **“Blueing the Black Sea”** through fighting nutrient pollution in the Black Sea. The Project will benefit Common Maritime Agenda countries through strengthening the understanding at regional level of the economic impact of pollution. It will also try to help riparian states mitigate the impact of the war on the marine life of the Black Sea and offer guidance on how to overcome it. In addition, this project through its scale-up mechanisms such as the Eco-Innovation Challenge, will allow public sector institutions, development partners and potential investors to identify, verify and invest in innovative solutions.

As one of the main challenges of our region is plastic and micro-plastic litter, I would like to also recall that the BSEC organized an international conference on marine litter, with a focus on the Danube River and the Black Sea Basin, in Sofia in 2019, to discuss a circular approach for the plastics value chain and the use of biodegradable materials for single-use plastics.

Similarly a Regional Stakeholders Workshop on “Economic opportunities of a circular economy: tackling plastic and micro-plastic pollution in the Black Sea region” was held online on 17 November 2020.

Thank you for your attention.