



First Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Serbia Ivica Dacic chaired an Informal Meeting of the Council of Foreign Ministers of Member States of the Organization of the Black Sea Economic Cooperation (BSEC), which was held on the margins of the session of the United Nations General Assembly in New York.

The BSEC Council discussed opportunities for promoting intraregional cooperation and the reform of the Organization, primarily aimed at its greater effectiveness and project-orientation.

FDPM/MFA of the Republic of Serbia Ivica Dacic emphasized that the Republic of Serbia attached great importance to the development of regional cooperation and good-neighbourly relations, and that Serbia's Chairmanship-in-Office in the period until 31 December 2016 would be focused on the further enhancement of cooperation among all BSEC Member States in areas of common interest. He pointed out that we had identified as our Chairmanship priorities the development of economic cooperation and improved operation of the Organization, as well as that we were ready to discuss with our partners all matters that could help improve cooperation in the BSEC region. We believe that BSEC could provide a framework in which regional countries could make concrete business deals and projects in the fields of trade, tourism, finance, infrastructure, investment, removal of tariff and other barriers, etc. In this respect, FDPM/MFA Dacic underlined the need to develop projects by putting emphasis on their functionality, purposefulness and viability, as well as on methods of funding forming an integral part of any projects, rather than expecting, as was the case to date, they should be financed from the Budget of the Organization.

The Meeting also exchanged thoughts about future activities of the Organization and it was commonly assessed that it was necessary to continue the past orientation of the Organization towards other forms of cooperation beneficial to all Member States in the wider Black Sea region.

Below is the opening statement by Minister Dacic at a meeting of the BSEC:

Distinguished Ministers,

Mr. Secretary General,

Dear guests,

I am honoured to be able to chair this high gathering and I wish to thank you all for coming and attending a meeting that is traditionally making it possible for us to get together in a somewhat less formal atmosphere to exchange views on the current situation and a way forward for the Organization of the Black Sea Economic Cooperation in the future.

At the outset, I would like to emphasize that the Republic of Serbia attaches great importance to the development of regional cooperation and good-neighbourly relations. Therefore, the Serbian Chairmanship-in-Office will focus on exploring further models of cooperation among all BSEC Member States in areas of common interest.

Although the Republic of Serbia has identified the development of economic cooperation and improvements in the work of the Organization as its Chairmanship priorities, we stand ready to discuss with our partners all matters that could help promote the cooperation in the Black Sea region.

In this context, I would like to single out a number of main points:

1. With regard to an improved operation of our Organization, we recognize the problems and challenges facing the BSEC. Which is why the Republic of Serbia encourages all Member States to come up with their ideas and solutions to increase the effectiveness of BSEC. The way we look at it, is that failure to implement projects presents the main problem. Generally, project proposals do exist, but due to the lack of finances, projects are largely not developed beyond the drafting stage. Given the fact that BSEC is an economic organization that is not dealing with political relations between the Member States, projects are the bedrock and purpose of its existence. Without concrete activities, BSEC is a mere shell international organization. Consequently, Serbia would like to suggest that when developing projects, emphasis should be placed on their functionality, purposefulness and viability, and that methods of funding should constitute an integral part of any projects, rather than the projects are expected, as has been the case until now, to be financed from the Budget of the Organization.

Additionally, the Republic of Serbia holds the view that a systemic solution should be found to cut down on administrative costs, with simultaneous reduction in the number of meetings and integration of related Working Groups and through other ways to be defined together. Proposals in this respect have already been advanced by previous Chairmanships-in-Office, especially during the Russian Federation Chairmanship. We believe, therefore, that we should continue to work on this.

2. As far as Serbia is concerned, promotion of economic cooperation and economic position of the Member States is a number one priority both in the BSEC and in most other international organizations. In our opinion, BSEC should provide a framework for regional countries to make business deals and projects in the fields of trade, tourism, finance, infrastructure, investment, removal of tariff and other barriers, etc.

3. In view of the current UNGA session at which the Republic of Serbia will table, on behalf of

the BSEC Member States, a Resolution concerning cooperation between the United Nations and BSEC, I consider this to be a good opportunity to speak also about cooperation with other international organizations and with the European Union as well, to which Serbia as an EU candidate country attributes great significance.

Dear colleagues, now I would like to hear your suggestions and ideas on these and other subject-matters that you deem important and that are within the purview of the Black Sea economic cooperation, including on the preparations for the Summit to mark the 25th anniversary of the BSEC inception.

Also, I would ask the Secretary General, Ambassador Christides for his invaluable assistance and guidance, for I believe that none of us present here know the Organization better than Ambassador Christides.