



Statement By First Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs Ivica Dacic At the 41st Meeting of the Council of Ministers of the Member States of the Black Sea Economic Cooperation Organization.

Esteemed Mr. Chairman,
Mr. Secretary General,
Your Excellencies,
Ladies and gentlemen,

Let me, first of all, welcome all the participants of this distinguished gathering, and especially our host, His Excellency Minister Dendias, and thank for the excellent organization both of the meeting itself and of the overall chairmanship of the Organization of the Black Sea Economic Cooperation (BSEC) by the Hellenic Republic. I have specially highlighted the above said, given the large number of outstanding issues that the Organization has dealt with in the past period, which makes the present time a kind of crossroads for the Organization's way forward in the future.

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In this regard, I would like to point out that, as before, the Republic of Serbia has endeavored to be a constructive partner and to support and assist any initiative aimed at enhancing cooperation among the countries of the wider Black Sea region gathered in this international organization. Unfortunately, as you all know, a considerable amount of time and resources have been used to address the internal reform of the Organization, especially in the funding segment, rather than in developing new projects and implementing existing ones. In this context, Serbia is committed to devoting more time to furthering concrete and tangible cooperation between Member States in future work, with, of course, continued efforts aimed at reform and optimization of work.

I would like to reiterate what representatives of the Republic of Serbia have been constantly saying in this forum, which is that this Organization has a great potential both for economic cooperation and for improving overall cooperation between the member states, which should be taken full advantage of while avoiding politicization of work as much as possible and all that

may harm bilateral relations between the member states of the Organization.

In view of specific areas of co-operation, sectors such as energy, trade, tourism and transport are of particular interest to Serbia, which is why we devote particular attention to these topics. This does not mean that other areas of work of the Organization are less important to us, but it should be borne in mind that over-expanding the topics and accumulating the number of meetings do not help to achieve goals and make it difficult for most member states to engage in the activities of this international organization. Therefore, Serbia has always advocated rational chairmanship planning and holding of meetings in working groups and other bodies only in case a step forward and concrete progress are made on the topic they are dealing with. In this way, experts from member states would be left ample room to focus on and be involved as much as possible in the work and specific projects. We believe that Greece has largely succeeded in integrating this principle in its chairmanship, and we are grateful for this to it.

As regards the financing of specific projects, I emphasize that Serbia does not regret spending funds if these are allocated for something that all member states would benefit from. In this context, we do not diminish the importance of the Project Development Fund, however, we are not ready to invest in potential projects as a lump sum and do not support the said fund to be financed from the already overburdened regular budget of the Organization.

Regional co-operation is one of the most important foreign policy priorities of the Republic of Serbia, both with neighboring countries and more broadly within the Black Sea region. We are active in almost all major regional fora, especially given the current international political trends in the world where regional approach is gaining in importance, in which respect Europe is a prime example.

I would also like to add that the cooperation of BSEC with other international organizations is also an important segment for the Republic of Serbia, as is its interaction with the European Union, which Serbia, as an EU candidate country, is particularly interested in.

Ladies and gentlemen, I wish you success in the further deliberations and thank the host country once again for an exceptional reception and very well-organized chairmanship. I also wish Romania, as the next Chair, every success in their work, with the message that they can count on the full engagement and support of the Republic of Serbia.

Thank you.

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