

**Statement by the Deputy Secretary General of the Black Sea Economic Cooperation Organization
Ambassador Dimitrios Rallis at the Regional Forum on Sustainable Development for the UNECE Region
(Geneva, 29-30 March 2023)**

Mr Chairman,

Mrs Executive Secretary General of the UNECE,

For the Black Sea Economic Cooperation, the Regional Economic Organization that I have the privilege to represent here today, the United Nations 2030 Agenda and its highly ambitious agenda of Sustainable Development Goals lie at the heart of our developmental strategy and policies. We regard these goals all interconnected and of the highest importance for promoting a balanced and sustained development in the wider Black Sea region which forms a bridge between Europe and Asia, for the benefit of both current and future generations. Fostering cooperation between its 13 Member States in all areas related to the Sustainable Development Goals is a top priority in the work of BSEC. This is enshrined in the BSEC Economic Agenda – our strategic document that constitutes the base and defines the priorities for the BSEC cooperation;

Before presenting to you the main actions, strategies and achievements of BSEC in this field, allow me to briefly outline who we are and why SDGs matter so much for us. BSEC, the Organization of the Black Sea Economic Cooperation, is a regional international entity, that was established 31 years ago with the purpose to promote closer and lasting economic cooperation – in the widest sense of the term – among its 13 Member States and beyond. Our efforts have not been without difficulties. Indeed, what we are experiencing now are unprecedented situations, caused first by the Covid 19 pandemic and now with the situation created by the war in Ukraine. These unfortunate and grave developments which take place in the northern part of our region, in disrespect of international law, are a cause of serious concern to us and present additional obstacles in our efforts to achieve the SDGs. We do however hope that reason and wisdom will prevail and a diplomatic solution to the conflict in accordance with the international law be reached sooner than later. This is even more crucial, as we live and act in a very complex region like the wider Black Sea region, encompassing areas with difficult historic relations, like the Black Sea itself, the Balkans and Caucasus. Its membership is in itself a “microcosm” as far as it includes States which are also Members of the EU, others that are Members of the Eurasian Economic Union and others that are still in the midst of accession procedures to one or the other. In addition to that, BSEC is covering an area of paramount geostrategic importance: it actually forms the bridge between Europe and Asia, while at the same time it is a significant energy hub and a vital transportation crossroads between North-South and East-West. Despite all these difficulties, BSEC during the 3 decades of its existence has managed to establish a culture of dialogue and understanding and, also, the most important, useful networks among state and private institutions, thus becoming an important instrument for cooperation and coordination in the wider region of the Black Sea.

Concrete achievements that have been so far registered in all these areas have certainly enhanced the relevance of BSEC and its extended commitment to put in practice SDG’s Goals. A lot has been done but

also a lot, if we are to obtain by 2030 the SDG goals set remains to be done. To make it clearer allow me to refer indicatively to some relevant steps undertaken by our Organization:

The BSEC Climate Change Adaptation Strategy helped to develop policies and synergies in the field of climate change. BSEC Permanent International Secretariat (BSEC PERMIS) is constantly pursuing this goal and is now playing a proactive role on this topic by implementing a number of projects focused on the environment of the Black Sea, which are being funded by the European Commission and other International Organizations. This is a tangible support to the efforts of cleaning the Black Sea.

The endorsement of the Common Maritime Agenda for the Black Sea by the riparian countries created a new momentum in the region and 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. We are now focusing, more particularly on blue growth, marine research and innovation, and the preservation of the marine environment for a productive, healthy, resilient and sustainable Black Sea, while considering the special and unique ecosystem characteristics of it, in particular, its unique biodiversity and cultural heritage sites.

Recently BSEC activities focused on the elaboration and finalization of such documents as “Trade Facilitation Strategy for the BSEC Region”, “Framework for BSEC Single Window Cooperation” and “Framework for e-Commerce Cooperation”; These areas play an important role in increasing cross-border trade and investments, and thus effectively contributing to the sustainable development.

The Black Sea Project Promotion Facility (BSPPF) established under the umbrella of the BSEC started its operations in early 2017 and up to date grant agreements were signed and respective amounts were allocated for 9 projects through the BSEC line of BSPPF operations. The areas of these projects encompassed such areas of cooperation as energy efficiency, tourism and gastronomy, e-commerce and promotion of SMEs, promotion of ICT.

In the Energy sector which is among our key priorities we are aiming at materializing the vision of transforming the BSEC region into a model of clean energy. Ensuring access to affordable, reliable, sustainable and modern energy for all are important elements of our strategy to implement the related sustainable Development Goals. In this framework, BSEC is expanding cooperation in the energy field with International Organizations and is participating in many important events including international conferences, seminars and fora. Of great significance for our member states and our partners, both governmental, private associations and academic institutions linked with BSEC became the BSEC Green Energy Network (BSEC-GEN) created in 2015 for exchanging information and sharing experiences among the various bodies mandated to promote Renewable Energy Sources and Energy Efficiency and research and academic institutions active in these areas. The activities of this Network are coordinated by the Energy Policy and Development Centre KEPA of the Athens University under the supervision and coordination of BSEC PERMIS

In the trade and transport areas we are engaged in the exploration of new areas where it is both desirable and realistic to develop and deepening multilateral cooperation in a regional format. We are currently focusing facilitating border crossings in the BSEC region and introducing new technologies, namely the digitalization of the transport documents and the automation of procedures for international trans-border trade and transport. We are thankful to UNECE for our very productive and action-oriented cooperation in this very important field.

In all its activities BSEC places also special emphasis on the promotion of the region's unique cultural heritage, aiming to increasing the awareness of the regional diversity and multiculturalism, as an added value providing factor for implementing SDGs.

To promote all goals above, the participation in the BSEC activities of the Observers and of the BSEC Sectoral Dialog Partners have brought important benefits to the Organization. To achieve these goals, BSEC Organization has implemented a large number of regional cooperation projects, established dynamic working relations with many International Organizations. Our cooperation with UNECE, especially in transport and energy sections are of highest importance for the BSEC. To optimize results of its actions, BSEC has established many specialized networks of both governmental, non-governmental and academia experts and interested stakeholders, thus becoming an important platform for better promoting and coordinating concrete cooperation in almost every sector of public life, for both the current and future generations. Last but not least I would like to stress the important contributions to our work of all other members of the BSEC Family, namely the BSTDB, the PABSEC, the ICBSS, as well as our important interaction with Observers, Sectoral Dialogue Partners and the various Think Tanks, including the International Center of Black Sea Studies (ICBSS) and the Black Sea Universities Network (BSUN).

In this spirit I would like to conclude by expressing BSECs appreciation for todays midterm SDGs implementation conference. Our aim here today is to both make all participants aware of what we are doing in this important field but also learn from others' experiences and best practices, as well as exploring further possibilities for joint projects and synergies. Our intention is to redouble our efforts in view of this year's SDG summit and to this end we express our appreciation to UNECE's commitment to promoting SDGs for the benefit of our entire region and beyond.

I thank you very much