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The High-Level Meeting for the Euro-Asia Region on Improving Cooperation on
Transit, Trade Facilitation and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development

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Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

Allow me first to sincerely congratulate the Government of the Socialist Republic of Viet Nam and the *UN-OHRLLS (United Nations Office of the High Representative for the Least Developed Countries, Landlocked Developing Countries and Small Island Developing States)* for organizing this very important and timely High Level Meeting.

It is an honor and privilege for me to address this distinguished audience, representing the *Black Sea Economic Cooperation Organization*, the oldest regional entity promoting economic cooperation - in the broadest sense of the term - among its 12 Member States and beyond. This year we are celebrating our first 25 years of activity; our celebrations will culminate with the BSEC Summit Meeting, which will be hosted in Istanbul, on May 22.

Ladies and Gentlemen, there is no need to underline that Transportation and Trade Facilitation are sectors to which BSEC attaches particular importance; after all, "**Economic Cooperation**" means exchange of goods and services, movement of people, in one word, greater connectivity! I am pleased to underline that already since 1996 we closely cooperate with UN Agencies, especially the UNECE, on trade and transport facilitation. In July 2001 this cooperation was given a sound basis and an ambitious framework through the conclusion of the Cooperation Agreement between UNECE and BSEC.

If you look into a map, you will note that the region covered by BSEC Member States is straddling the two continents, Asia and Europe; as you know, for some time now, efforts to establish better, faster and easier connectivity corridors between them, are on the forefront of efforts by many actors, public or private; just think of the efforts to **re-establish** the "Silk Road" between the two Continents, the modern concept of the camel caravans of old times, yet with the same aims and objectives: to facilitate communication, economic and cultural exchanges between States; to open up the economies of land-locked countries. In this context, whatever progress the BSEC Organization was - or, will be - able to achieve in implementing infrastructure projects that facilitate the transport of people and goods, **these** accomplishments will also directly support the objectives of International Organizations and national Governments in the greater region, since our activity does not take place in a vacuum, but in a way and manner that integrates it to existing multinational Transport projects, European or Euro-Asian.

For instance, the BSEC road infrastructure project called "**the Black Sea Ring Highway**" refers to coordinated efforts of our Member States for upgrading to "European" standards almost 7.5 thousand km of highway around the Black Sea, connecting its main ports and all the capitals of BSEC Member States. Some parts of this Ring Highway

are ready, more are under construction under the initiative and supervision of our respective Members, others are in the stage of planning.

Another major project, called “*Motorways of the Sea*” refers to coordinated efforts for the upgrading of port-infrastructure, the implementation of good practices, for increasing compatibility and interconnectivity of traffic control systems, and for safeguarding free and fair competition in international shipping. Almost 43 ports, not only in the Black Sea, have expressed interest in participating in this ambitious project.

Our constant efforts are, also, aimed at diminishing red tape and bureaucracy when it comes to moving goods - and people - across land or sea borders, by harmonizing and simplifying procedures, formalities and the necessary documentation. We might build the best of highways, yet if we do not streamline the above bottlenecks, we will continuously lose time, profit and patience.

The BSEC Organization always seeks - and already enjoys - fruitful cooperation with many international partners, like UNECE, UNDP, OSCE, CEI, TRACECA, Danube Commission, IRU, IRF, BSEC-URTA, BASPA and other international organizations. Especially with IRU and the *BSEC Union of Road Transport Associations* (BSEC-URTA) we have established a partnership based on concrete joint projects and actions with regard to road transports.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Despite the obvious difficulties, given the overall situation in the wider Black Sea region, the BSEC Organization aspires to assume a greater role in promoting the concept of international intermodal transport corridors, in order to facilitate trade and ensure greater regional integration.

In this effort we are looking forward to increase our synergy with all other interested stakeholders, to promote Public-Private Partnerships and to attract the interest of International Financial Institutions.

Thank you for your kind attention.