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CONTRIBUTION

by

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We are grateful to the Secretariat of the OSCE for having invited our organization to this First Preparatory Meeting of the OSCE Economic and Environmental Forum.

Founded in 1992, at a summit meeting in Istanbul, BSEC was launched as an initiative aimed at fostering peace, stability and prosperity in the Black Sea region through economic cooperation.

Subsequently it became a regional intergovernmental organisation, with the adoption of its Charter that entered into force in 1999, having 12 Member States.

Over the years, BSEC has defined common policy approaches of the 12 Member States in summit and ministerial declarations, inter-governmental agreements, plans of action and strategy documents, and has launched a number of major projects and initiatives of interest for the Member States.

Significant progress in shaping a common agenda, in order for the regional cooperation in BSEC framework to serve their common interests, was made by the adoption of the “BSEC Economic Agenda: Towards an Enhanced BSEC Partnership”, endorsed by the BSEC Summit held in Istanbul on 26 June 2012.

The *Economic Agenda* is a document of a strategic nature for guiding the cooperation in the BSEC framework in order to meet the goals set by the BSEC Charter. All the BSEC Working Groups – where the cooperation activities and projects are elaborated – are actively considering at their regular meetings specific action to implement the *Economic Agenda 2012*.

Fighting corruption is among the goals set by the *Economic Agenda 2012*, as it endangers economic and social development and also accountable governance.

The *Goal 10 - Closer Cooperation in the field of Banking and Finance* – foresees, *inter alia*, “Exploring opportunities for regional cooperation and coordination in combating crime in banking and financial services.”

The *Goal 15 - Good Governance and the Rule of Law* – envisages in its framework of action, *inter alia*: “Encouraging the BSEC Member States to promote civil society participation in providing good governance through their involvement in processes of securing integrity, transparency and fight against corruption.”

The *GOAL 16 – Combating Organized Crime, Illegal Trafficking of Drugs and Weapons, Terrorism, Corruption and Money Laundering* – indicates in its framework of Action, *inter alia*:

- Strengthening the cooperation among the BSEC Member States in combating organized crime activities, such as the trafficking of human beings, drugs, weapons and radioactive materials, corruption, smuggling of motor vehicles and cyber-crime as well as the money laundering and illicit financial activities.
- Elaborating a BSEC Action Plan on preventing and combating corruption, with the aim of establishing a network for sharing information and best practices among the relevant agencies of the Member States and between them and civil society.
- Enhancing cooperation with other international organizations on combating organized crime, corruption and terrorism and using their expertise and the expertise of the networks of law enforcement agencies involved in these fields.

This last provision explains our presence today at this First Preparatory Meeting of the OSCE Forum.

Several initiatives in the BSEC framework were undertaken aimed at implementing the above mentioned goals, and I will share some of them with the participants in this Meeting.

In April 2011, The Ministers of Interior of the BSEC Member States have approved a *Joint Declaration on regional efforts on Preventing and combating corruption*.

In this document the Ministers agreed:

- to promote cooperation among the national authorities involved in preventing and fighting corruption on bilateral or multilateral basis and support joint regional initiatives in this respect;
- to contribute in developing policies and implement measures for combating corruption;
- to encourage the exchange of the best practices in the region, while using the expertise of other bodies and international organization such as UN, OSCE, EU, Council of Europe, and of the networks of the law enforcement agencies in combating corruption.

The ministers instructed the *BSEC Working Group on Cooperation in Combating Crime* to elaborate a BSEC Action Plan on regional efforts to prevent and combat corruption with the aim to establish a network for sharing information and best practices among relevant agencies of the Member States and between them and civil society structures in order to prevent and combat corruption.

The *Working Group* has already prepared and agreed upon a *BSEC Action Plan on regional efforts in preventing and combating corruption*, and will be submitted for endorsement by the Ministers of Interiors.

Our *Working Group on Banking and Finance* has been examining from some years now the establishment of a mechanism of interaction and cooperation among the BSEC Member States for combating tax evasion, with the purpose to reduce the tax evasion phenomenon within the trade transactions developed by BSEC Member States.

The project has proven to be quite a complex one, implying involvement of several national authorities in each Member State, and has not yet been finalized.

In the same area, we are in the process of preparation of an educational workshop for medium/senior level financial regulators and supervisors in the BSEC Region, central bankers, deposit insurance and senior Ministry of Finance officials, with the purpose to inform the participants how to use various indicators and approaches to carry out their duties and to become alerted of risks of impending crisis and problems, including acts of corruption.

The workshop is in the process of being organized, with the support of the Central Bank of Turkey and of the Toronto Center, which has a valuable expertise in these fields. Current plans are to hold this workshop until the end of this year, in Istanbul.

Our *Working Groups on Transport, on Custom Matters, and on Trade and Economic Development* adopted several recommendations and are continuing to examine and to adopt determined action at regional level to facilitate border-crossing, particularly as regards road transportation.

One of the purposes of these efforts is linked to combatting corruption.

These efforts have not yet produced the desired results, which is a clear sign that all involved should increase their engagement towards this goal.

For instance, a recent *Survey* showed that the waiting time for commercial vehicles at all Border Crossing Points in the BSEC Region and along transport corridors linking Europe to Asia, exceeds 12 hours, on many occasions reaching more than 5-6 days! Such waiting times lead to an exorbitant increase of the cost of the goods transported and, also, to unacceptable cases of bribery and corruption.

The few examples that I mentioned indicate the great importance our Organization attaches to combating corruption in all its forms.

We look forward to listening to the exchanges and discussions of this Forum will certainly help us improving and intensifying our activities in this area by benefiting from best practices and experiences of other organizations attending this important event.