Second Black Sea Stakeholder Conference
Political opportunities to enhance business growth
Sofia, 24 March 2015

Mr Minister,
Mr Commissioner,
Distinguished participants,

Allow me first to express the appreciation of the Organization of the Black Sea Economic Cooperation (BSEC) to the organizers of the Second Black Sea Stakeholder Conference – the Ministry for Transport, Information Technology and Communications of the Republic of Bulgaria, particularly to H.E. Minister Ivaylo Moskovski, and to the European Union, particularly to Commissioner Karmenu Vella, for the invitation to take part in this important event.

We, in BSEC, welcome the discussion on the Blue Growth initiated last year by the European Commission, with the participation of maritime practitioners and entrepreneurs, to support sustainable growth in the marine and maritime sectors in the Black Sea region.

The first Conference on "Sustainable Development of the Blue Economy of the Black Sea" held in Bucharest on 30 January 2014 provided the participants with an overview of EU's Integrated Maritime Policy in the Black Sea. This Conference had a successful outcome, highlighting the need for a multifaceted approach to the regional integrated maritime policy. We were able to follow up on the results at this conference, both at a high political level – scheduling meetings with the European Commissioner – and at experts' level.

Maritime cooperation has a significant share in the activities of our Organization and we are working for further strengthening it, in accordance with the provisions of the BSEC *Economic Agenda 2012*, which is our guiding strategic document for the coming years.

Maritime cooperation is closely linked to trade and economic development, which is one of the most important areas of cooperation in the framework of BSEC.
We are focusing on the stimulating the development of intra-regional trade and investment, trying to take advantage as much as possible of the neighbourliness

and the economic complementarities between our Member States. Trade is of course a strong catalyst for economic growth, but it is not enough. There is need for creating the conditions and the certainty for businesses to invest. Our Member States require increased sustainable development, enlarged and improved productive capacities and infrastructure of all kind.

Through our specialized meetings at ministerial level and at expert level, in our Working Groups, and through the projects initiated within our Organization, we work for enhancing business growth, for helping our Member States to find efficient investment opportunities and matchmaking with the international financial institutions, for concrete measures of Trade Facilitation within the BSEC Region.

In cooperation with other international organizations, in particular the UNECE, we are endeavoring to develop of a number of trade facilitation instruments in the BSEC Region, in particular Port Community and Single Window systems for improved trade information flows. As a matter of fact, the forthcoming Meeting of the Ministers in charge of Economy of the BSEC Member States, to be held in Chişinău on 29 May 2015, will focus on Facilitating Intra-regional Trade and Investments.

Closely related to the maritime cooperation is also our intensive cooperation in the field of transport. In fact the major projects initiated and developed by BSEC are in precisely in this area.

One of them is the Motorways of the Sea project, directed at strengthening the maritime links aiming the port of the BSEC Member States. The activities in this project include the upgrading of port facilities, identification of projects of common interest and securing free and fair competition in international shipping.

In 2013, the Experts Correspondence Network was established.

Several projects are under consideration:

- BSEC MARLINK – related to maritime links in the BSEC Region;
- BSEC PORTS – related to collection of all port data in a single web site;

- BSEC MoS HOTLINE – related to introduction of activities of private stakeholders.

We are in the process of discussing a possible BSEC-International Maritime Organization (IMO) cooperation on project management and development in maritime projects.

The other major transport project is the development of the Black Sea Ring Highway, to connect the BSEC Member States with each other. In parallel, we are working for the implementation of a Memorandum of Understanding signed by our Member States in 2002 in Facilitation of Road Transport of Goods in the BSEC Region.

Highly relevant for the development of maritime cooperation are also the new directions of action identified by the Ministers of Transport of the BSEC Member States in their Meetings in Sofia on 16 April 2014, and in Thessaloniki on 25 November 2014. Their Joint Declarations "Through enhanced BSEC regional co-operation towards a safe and sustainable transport" and "Integrated intermodal and logistics solutions in the BSEC Region", respectively, emphasised the conviction of the Ministers that an enhanced regional transport cooperation will ensure sustainable economic growth within the BSEC Region and expressed their willingness to work together, *inter alia*, for:

- a green and safe transport in the Region;
- the development of a road map in order to create an integrated and multimodal regional transportation system, competitive in the global service market.

The ministers emphasised the importance of close co-operation and coordination of activities between BSEC and the EU, as well as other international organizations and institutions such as the ECO, CIS and EurAsEC.

In this spirit, our Organization is open to enhancing BSEC-EU cooperation in the context of implementation of EU's Integrated Maritime Policy for the Black Sea, aiming to achieve better coordination in the marine and maritime sectors,

by prioritizing joint efforts in spatial planning, transport, aquaculture, seabed mining, sea energy, blue biotechnology and coastal tourism.

We are ready to work collectively and in partnership with the European Commission in supporting a blue and sustainable economy in the BSEC Region.

In fact, we are beginning to intensify our contacts with Brussels at experts' level and share our positive experiences in developing projects in the field of environment protection, science and technology, information and communication technologies, culture and education, SMEs and agriculture. In particular in the area of maritime affairs, we are prepared to discuss the possibilities for joint activities in fisheries, maritime transport, green energy and sea tourism. In this framework, we were also happy to contribute to the scoping mission, organized by the European Commission, to assess the feasibility of a project on Integrated Maritime policy in the Black Sea.

I am confident that our exchanges and conclusions we are going to reach today will have a positive impact on both governments and business communities, encouraging them to intensify activities for developing the blue economy in our region. I look forward to fruitful discussions and to the successful outcome of this Conference, with beneficial results for all the States in the Black Sea region.

I would conclude by expressing high appreciation for the excellent organization and gratitude for the hospitality extended to all of us by our hosts.