

Dear Mr. Chairman,

Dear Ministers, dear friends,

Allow me first of all to thank the organizers for inviting me to participate in this important Round Table concerning barriers to international road transport.

Let me also add that I am extremely happy because 5 out of the 12 Member States (MS) of the Organization I have the honor to represent are participating in this meeting through the presence of their Ministers and Deputy Ministers responsible for Transports in general.

I could respond very briefly to your question, Mr. Cox, by underlining that all the very pertinent questions, as described in the comprehensive outline of our Meeting, are being constantly discussed during the meetings of all BSEC organs involved in issues of Transports in general. In its region of competence, the BSEC Organization tries to respond to all the above questions, with a varying degree of success, it is true. So, the BSEC Organization is there, having accumulated a valuable 26-year-long experience and if its Member States showed a greater sense of ownership, if they used the full potential of the mechanisms BSEC has at its disposal, then surely this mature Organization could offer much more, both to its Member States and to other interested stakeholders.

The region covered by the territories of BSEC MS is of paramount geostrategic importance, as it straddles three continents: Europe, Asia and Africa.

Unfortunately, physical and non-physical barriers still threaten trade and transports, as well as the movement of people, goods and services in the BSEC region; for example, the BSEC road transport scene is strongly dominated by bilateral systems of permits, which restrict to a great extent the liberalization of the relevant market.

As I said, the issue of lifting the existing barriers is permanently on the agenda of the relevant Working Groups. The results of our efforts are presented at the BSEC Stand, which we put-up for the first time during this year's ITF Exhibition here in Leipzig and to which I cordially invite you all for a brief visit.

Two of the pet projects of our Organization, in what concerns trade and transport facilitation, are **a)** the Black Sea Ring Highway and **b)** the Motorways of the Sea, projects which are implemented as integral parts of other, greater initiatives covering the Euro-Asian region, like TEN and TRACECA.

Of course, apart from these large scale projects, special attention is also given to reduce bureaucracy and red tape, thus, we introduced the BSEC Permit, the BSEC International Vehicle Certificate, etc., and also to simplify documentation and to harmonize customs and other time- and money-consuming procedures, for example, by adopting a Single Window System.

The elimination of all these barriers requires a) coordinated efforts of national authorities, the private sector, international organizations and of other stakeholders, b) the implementation of the key UN transport-related Conventions and Agreements, and c) the introduction and use of new technologies (for example, digitalization), in combination with the relevant adaptation of legislation, because the future is not tomorrow, it is today and it cannot wait.

So, in conclusion, the message I wish to convey both to our Member States and to other interested States and stakeholders is that a mature, experienced regional vehicle, the BSEC Organization, is here, willing and ready to promote cooperation and coordination in the geostrategic region of the Black Sea region, so just use it, just take advantage of the mechanisms it offers.

Thank you for your kind attention.