

Dear Minister Porodzanov, dear Commissioner Vella, dear Ministers, Deputy Ministers and State Secretaries from the Ministries of Agriculture, dear Representatives of international organizations, Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am honoured and privileged to address the High-Level Conference on behalf of the *Permanent International Secretariat* of the Organization of the *Black Sea Economic Cooperation* (BSEC).

Allow me to express our sincere thanks **to the host country**, Bulgaria, for its traditional warm hospitality and the excellent organization of this event.

Being the last speaker, my dilemma is how to keep the interest of this distinguished audience, how can I find something “original” or “new” to add to what has already been said, how can I divert your attention from your smartphones to my words!

Well, allow me to make an attempt, by putting forward a proposal here, today, if it has not been already proposed: let the national representatives present in our meeting undertake the commitment to have the very important and interesting film of the GFCM, shown at the beginning, be transmitted through the national TV channels of all Black Sea littoral States to the greater public of our countries. I believe that it will help make people in the region more sensitive to the complexity of the issues put forward today.

Ladies and gentlemen, the BSEC Organization attaches **special importance** to the promotion of joint activities in the field of fisheries and aquaculture in the Black Sea region. **And it could not be differently:** after all, a great number of the people in our Member States, especially those with a coastline on the Black Sea, make their living from their labours connected, one way or the other, with the Sea. Fishing and Fisheries **shaped** – and **continue** to shape - the **society** and **culture** of the coastal towns and communities along the shores of the Black Sea, but **also** of the Aegean, the Ionian and the Mediterranean Seas.

I am very proud and happy that all 9 national representatives who took the floor today are envoys of **BSEC Member** States – I am less happy, because almost **no one mentioned** our Organization as a **useful vehicle** for cooperation in this crucial field of Fisheries and Aquaculture!

Now, how does the BSEC Organization function in this so important national economy sector? First of all, we have the "**BSEC Economic Agenda**", a strategic document that constitutes the "**Bible**" - or the "**Koran**" - of our Organization; it guides most of the BSEC activities in this field. Our main goals refer to the promotion of **regional cooperation** for the **sustainable** management of fishery resources; the realization of these goals is the responsibility mainly of our relevant Working Group on Agriculture and Agro-industry.

Recently, the Ministers of Agriculture of the BSEC Member States - I mean you, dear Ministers - adopted a **Joint Declaration on their interaction in the field of agriculture and agro-industry**, which lays emphasis on the **elaboration of efficient measures of control and surveillance for the fishing in the boundary-neighboring fishing-fields**.

Another proof of the significance BSEC attaches to these issues is the **International Conference on Fisheries and Blue Growth**, which was held in Istanbul in early November 2017, organized by BSEC and the Sariyer municipality. During the Conference the **main issues** affecting fisheries management, the environmental and socio-economic impact on fisheries and aquaculture and the perspectives of development of these sectors in the Black Sea area were thoroughly discussed.

I sincerely hope that some of the important conclusions of "our" Conference can be taken into account as a contribution to the efforts of so many stakeholders in order to **reverse the declining trend of fish stocks in the Black Sea**.

Indeed, we hope that we will be able to repeat this event next year, with the support of all the important international organizations and entities involved and, mainly, with the active participation of **regional** representatives, **public and from private business**. It is imperative to be able to effectively transmit to the **actual "workers of and in the Sea"** the results of the relevant governmental and scientific Conferences, so that the results and conclusions of the latter do not remain **only** in the domain of governmental employees and scientists.

In fact, I wish to seize this opportunity and propose to the GFCM, **to you Mr. Executive Secretary**, and to the European Commission, **to you Commissioner Vela**, to convene next year, back-to-back to the event I just mentioned, a joint BSEC-EC-GFCM **scientific workshop/seminar on environmental issues and their socio-economic impact on living marine resources and ecosystems in the Black Sea**.

Let me underline here that the activities of the BSEC Organization in the field of fisheries and aquaculture in the Black Sea area **are not in competition** with those of other regional and international organizations; **on the contrary**, they aim to **complement** the efforts of interested stakeholders in the region as supplementary measures for overcoming the existing challenges of today and for jointly establishing a brighter tomorrow in the Black Sea.

Are we **satisfied** with BSEC's achievements up to this day? Frankly speaking **yes, although**, the room for improvement **being** the biggest room of all, we should **certainly improve** and enhance our efficiency and effectiveness. For achieving this improvement we perhaps do not need **more** Declarations: the Bucharest Declaration and the Sofia Declaration you are going to adopt today are enough for action in the next 10 years, as Commissioner Vella pointed out! We do not need **more** Documents or **more** Words; what we **need** is **more action, more deeds**, because the basic legal framework for such action and the necessary mechanisms **already exist – the BSEC Organization being one of the latter**.

So, in concluding, **my message – and appeal**, at the same time - not only to **you**, the **representatives** of the BSEC Member States, but also to **all other interested stakeholders**, is to **increase the sense of ownership** towards "**your Organization**" and to take **better advantage** of the opportunities that BSEC is able to collectively offer to all its Member States. We, in the PERMIS, will continue to promote cooperation in the field of fisheries and aquaculture in the wider Black Sea region, maintaining the traditional coordination with our partners, including the GFCM and the European Commission, as well as other regional organizations and international institutions.