

7th UNWTO Silk Road Task Force Meeting, Valencia, Spain, 30-31 March 2017

Talking Points of the Secretary General of the BSEC PERMIS

Ambassador Michael B. Christides

I wish to thank the organizers of this important meeting, to which the Organization I have the honor to represent, the Organization of the “Black Sea Economic Cooperation”, participates for the first time. I especially wish to thank and congratulate our generous hosts, the city of beautiful Valencia and, of course, I wish to express my gratitude to the Secretary General of the UNWTO, H.E. Mr. Taleb Rifai, for his consistent support and his kind words on my behalf.

The BSEC Organization has been following with great interest the development of the UNWTO Silk Road Programme and various ideas connected to the modern-day concept of the Silk Road have been considered within the BSEC Working Groups on Culture and on Tourism. As the geographic region covered by our Member States practically serves as the bridge between Europe and Asia, East and West, all initiatives and projects promoting the overall connectivity between the two great continents concern and interest greatly the BSEC Organization.

Consequently, it is not a coincidence that 10 BSEC Member States are actively involved in the UNWTO Silk Road Task Force; nor should it surprise you that BSEC, as the oldest and institutionally more mature Organization in the greater Black Sea area, is interested to further explore the regional aspects of the UNWTO Silk Road Programme.

After all, our Organization has been for almost 25 years actively promoting economic cooperation, trade and transport in the region, among others, through projects such as the Black Sea Ring Highway and the Motorways of the Sea, thus all Member States of the BSEC region and the whole Eurasian area can benefit from these major infrastructural projects.

Yet our aim is also to support the cultural and civilizational dimension of this new connectivity in the region; we wish to establish closer contacts among the people of the area and cultivate a pattern of continuous cultural exchanges, in short (and perhaps without realizing it), we have been promoting the same goals as the UNWTO Silk Road initiative!

The latest example of that is the “25th BSEC Anniversary Motorcycle Rally” that the Permanent International Secretariat (PERMIS) of BSEC is organizing as one of its anniversary events, which will offer to motorcyclists – participants a spectacular route from Istanbul, along the beautiful Black Sea coast of Turkey to the breathtaking Caucasus in Georgia. We will be introducing, with the support of the relevant authorities of our two Member States, a small portion of the Silk Road to the globally ever-growing number of motorcycle tourists – visitors!

Having heard the speakers that preceded me I believe that BSEC PERMIS can be very helpful in further promoting the Silk Road Programme especially in the Capacity Building and Destination Management area of activity: we can host in our ample premises in Istanbul any seminars or

workshops for the education – training of people involved in the realization/implementation of the Programme; as you know, Istanbul is geographically close to many of the States involved in the Silk Road initiative and it is an important hub in the wider region. PERMIS could provide effective, economic and focused solutions not only for the relevant needs of its Member States, but also for those of other participant countries to the Silk Road Programme.

We will propose to include the cooperation of the BSEC Member States on the Silk Road Programme as a separate agenda item of the relevant Working Group on Cooperation in Tourism, which is meeting on the 20th of April in Varna, in order to approach the issue in a collective way. We will also try to encourage the remaining two BSEC Member States to become involved in the UNWTO Silk Road Programme.

I wish to congratulate the University of Valencia and acknowledge the important and in-depth work and analysis it has already accomplished in what concerns all aspects of the Silk Road Programme. I believe that it could be very useful to hold an extensive seminar by representatives of the Valencia University in Istanbul, for the benefit of all public and private stakeholders, especially academics, from States in the wider Balkan – Black Sea region, in order to acquaint them with the many facets of the initiative.

I took also note of the existence of a *“Silk Road University Network”*, based in South Korea, so I wish to propose to enrich the number of participants to this network with more universities from the BSEC Member States, an initiative that I will put forward at the next meeting of the BSEC Working Group on Cooperation in Tourism in Varna. I am looking forward to cooperate on these issues with the Vice Rector and other dignitaries of the Valencia University, in order to explore ways for implementing the above ideas.

Apart from the above and in cooperation with the relevant Department of the UNWTO, the World Federation of Tourist Guide Associations and that of the respective national authorities, we could host in PERMIS premises special training seminars for Silk Road guides from Balkan, Black Sea and Caucasus states, in a way that not only would be cheaper for all involved, but it would also take place in a collective and coordinated way, thus further enhancing regional cooperation (*“regionalism”*).

In conclusion, Ladies and Gentlemen, the BSEC PERMIS believes that the UNWTO Silk Road Programme offers many and important opportunities for the BSEC Member States and other stakeholders in the wider region, to cooperate even closer and more efficiently in the realization of a concept / dream which is today considered as *“one of the World’s most powerful brands in global tourism”*. PERMIS is willing and ready to assume with the support of the UNWTO any role considered useful for the success of this effort.