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Online, 21 December, 2022

45th Meeting of Council of Ministers of Foreign Affairs of the Organization of the Black Sea Economic Cooperation

Statement by H.E. Mr. Vahe Gevorgyan, Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Armenia

Mr. Chairman, Secretary General, Excellences, Dear Colleagues,

I would like to start by expressing our appreciation to the Government of the Republic of Moldova, personally to the Chairman-in-Office, Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Foreign Affairs and European Integration Mr. Nicu Popescu for the successful stewardship of their extended chairmanship in the Organization through these challenging times in the region. Under these circumstances, the Moldovan chairmanship spared no efforts to keep the BSEC platform open for dialogue and advance its important agenda. Our thanks also go to the Secretary-General, H.E. Lazăr Comănescu and BSEC PERMIS staff for their efforts in facilitating result-oriented regional economic cooperation.

The symbolism of 30th anniversary of BSEC comes to amplify the core message of the Organization that strong regional economic cooperation, stability and prosperity, effective multilateralism are instrumental tools for meeting common challenges and sustaining regional solidarity. This important BSEC anniversary is a pertinent reminder of our commitment to the guiding principles and objectives of our Organization.

As a founding member of the BSEC, Armenia reiterates its commitment to the full use of the potential of the BSEC for the promotion of regional economic and commercial cooperation and advancing the effective implementation of the statutory objectives of the Organization. With this understanding, Armenia has substantially engaged in the discussions and provided its proposals on the efficiency of the BSEC working methods and the “2012 Economic Agenda”.

Armenia has taken steps towards promoting the sectoral collaboration including in the priority areas of the Moldovan Chairmanship. As a country-coordinator of the BSEC Working Group on Energy, Armenia in partnership with the PERMIS organized a webinar entitled “Green Energy in the BSEC Region and Beyond” with a particular emphasis on the BSEC Green Energy Strategy. Based on the success of the Armenia-ICBSS joint webinar on cultural tourism and digital transformation held last year, it is our intention to organize together with ICBSS a follow-up BSEC regional workshop on tourism in Yerevan in the near future. In the context of the 30th anniversary of the BSEC

a concert of classical music of Komitas National String Quartet was organized by the Permanent Mission of Armenia to BSEC in Istanbul.

Mr. Chairman,

At the national level, the solid recovery seen in the Armenian economy in 2021 carried stronger growth momentum into 2022, with economic growth reaching over 14% in the period from January to September. For example, the industrial output grew by 10%, construction sector by 14.3%, domestic trade turnover upped 14.5%. Armenia's foreign trade in January-September 2022 amounted to over \$9.3 billion having surged by 62.5% from the same time span in 2021. The foreign trade turnover with several BSEC Members States registered an extensive growth in the reported period.

Mr. Chairman,

Despite this strong growth, Armenia's socio-economic development remains seriously challenged by the ongoing aggression from Azerbaijan. In mid-September Azerbaijan launched yet another unprovoked and premeditated military aggression across Armenia's whole Eastern and South-Eastern border, intruding and occupying our sovereign territories. Azerbaijan has been striking military targets and critical civilian infrastructures alike, indiscriminately targeting civilian population and settlements, schools and hospitals, roads and energy infrastructures, resorts and recreational facilities, farms and agricultural lands, burning forests inside Armenia. This aggression claimed hundreds of lives including among civilians and lead to the displacement of thousands of people mostly women, children, elderly and people with disabilities.

As we speak, it is already the tenth day that Azerbaijan, grossly violating its international obligations and trilateral statement of November 9, 2020, has blocked the movement through the Lachin Corridor - the only lifeline of Nagorno-Karabakh, which is now essentially cut off from Armenia and the outside world, while its people have been deprived of the right to free movement and are facing the imminent threat of food, energy and overall humanitarian crisis, which if not addressed urgently will lead into a catastrophe. UN Security Council yesterday's discussion clearly indicated the strong and unequivocal international consensus on immediate and unconditional opening of the Lachin Corridor.

All these aggressive actions by Azerbaijan put the prospect for peace and stability in the region under serious risk. The situation deriving from the use of force and aggression against Armenia cannot become a basis for lasting and sustainable peace. We firmly believe that conflicts need to be solved through peaceful means and that regional economic cooperation can contribute to enhancing peace, stability, prosperity and well-being of people, as stipulated in the BSEC Charter. And we expect from international community an unwavering support to the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Armenia and peaceful resolution of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict.

Mr. Chairman,

As a landlocked developing country, Armenia reiterates the importance of unfettered, efficient and cost-effective access to and from the sea by all means of transport, on the basis of the freedom of transit, as well as development of regional connectivity and sustainable transport systems in the BSEC region by effective utilization of the existing regional transportation links and infrastructures and creating the new ones. Armenia is ready to proceed with unblocking of communications on the basis of full respect of sovereignty, territorial integrity and national legislation.

Mr. Chairman,

Neutrality, impartiality and strict adherence to the principles of the BSEC Charter and provisions of the Statutory Documents should guide every elected high-level official, whether it is in BSEC or its related bodies. Unfortunately, the current Secretary-General of PABSEC Mr. Asaf Hajiyev with his actions has failed to uphold the required high standards of an international civil servant, by misusing his high office for dissemination of false and misleading propaganda narratives in his public statements published on the PABSEC Official Twitter account. We strongly urge PASBEC Secretary-General to show responsibility to his high position and act strictly in lines of his mandate, as it is enshrined in the relevant regulations of the Assembly.

Mr. Chairman,

Let us use this anniversary to reflect on the lessons of the past three decades, and reaffirm our commitment to pushing the Organization to reach its goals and live up to its ideals for peace, stability and development for the benefit of our people in the region in these turbulent times. In the rapidly changing international environment, the BSEC remains invaluable regional vehicle for common progress. Only when we work together we can overcome shared challenges and seize shared opportunities.

In conclusion I would like to congratulate the Republic of Serbia, the incoming Chairman-in-office of BSEC, wish success in their endeavors and express our support to their efforts in strengthening the regional economic cooperation and making the Organization more result-oriented.

Thank you!