

## Welcome Speech

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Ladies and Gentlemen,

Dear participants,

I welcome all of you here in Tbilisi at the **3<sup>rd</sup> International Silk Road Symposium**.

- Since ancient times the Black Sea area as part of Silk Road has been the cradle of different civilizations, where political-economic relations were well developed.
- Strategic resources, emerging markets, tremendous potential of developing trade of goods and services create a basis for developing of profitable political and economic relations. This already is present reality of the Black Sea Region.
- The beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century offers a solid ground and sufficient opportunities to develop new concepts and attitudes.
- According to this new approach the Black sea Region should be regarded as a natural part of the whole European Architecture.
- The fact that Greece is the member of EU, Romania and Bulgaria are the candidate countries, Turkey is a member of European Customs Union, Georgia and together with other South Caucasus countries, Ukraine and Moldova are involved in the ENP makes the Black sea Region more interesting and attractive for the EU.
- The cooperation within the framework of regional organization of BSEC gains a special significance.
- In 1999 participating countries adopted BSEC-EU Platform of Cooperation, which lay down the basis for the institutional principles of the regional organization of BSEC and EU relations and cooperation. This fact proves the EU's vital interest in the region.
- Certain success is achieved in linking the Black Sea region's transport infrastructure to European and Asian networks through the Black Sea PETRA, TRACECA and other projects.

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- EU program TACIS, along with other issues, focuses on TRACECA project. TRACECA stands for **Transport Corridor Europe Caucasus Asia** and its main goal is to develop economic relations, trade and transport communications along this Corridor.
- The Black Sea region is an important transit route for diversification of energy resource transportation from central Asia to Europe and thus contributing to energy security of Europe.
- Promotion of regional co-operation in and beyond the South Caucasus region, in particular in the framework of the Black Sea, GUAM, Caspian basin is at the top of the governments agenda and widely presented in the ENP AP.
- ENP AP stresses the need of enhancing the participation in regional cooperation fields such as the environment, education, border management, energy, transport and science and technological development.
- According to the ENP AP specific attention will be given to cooperation in regional law enforcement cooperation initiatives in the Black Sea region, including the Southern Caucasus, as well as through the EC-funded regional assistance initiatives such as SCAD.
- The Black Sea Region has vast potential and perspectives for development. The new initiatives that include enhancing of bilateral and multilateral cooperation in the region and between the Black Sea, the Baltic Sea and the Caspian Sea regions, boost the dynamics of regional development;
- These prospects are undermined by conflicts within the country. The conflicts are safe haven for smuggling, trafficking and organized crime and pose a considerable threat not only to the Black Sea Region but the EU as well. Therefore, we should work together towards peaceful resolution of the conflicts.
- I do believe that the work of the conference will show some issues of regional cooperation in a new light and give us grounds for further reflection.

Thank you for your attention