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THE FORTY THIRD PLENARY SESSION OF THE PABSEC GENERAL ASSEMBLY
LEGAL AND POLITICAL AFFAIRS COMMITTEE

REPORT^{*}

ROLE OF LOCAL AUTHORITIES IN STRENGTHENING
REGIONAL COOPERATION BETWEEN THE BSEC MEMBER
STATES

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I. INTRODUCTION

1. The Legal and Political Affairs Committee at its Forty Second Meeting in Bucharest on 15 October 2013 following the discussion on the futures and the prospects of the Assembly decided to examine the role of the local authorities in strengthening regional cooperation in the BSEC Member States.
2. In this respect, the Forty Third Meeting of the Committee in Moscow on 26-27 March 2014 is dedicated to “The Role of Local Authorities in Strengthening Regional Cooperation in the BSEC Member States” with a view to elaborate the Report and the Recommendation for further submission to the consideration of the Forty Third Plenary Session of the General Assembly in Athens in May 2014.
3. The present report is designed to take a broader look at the role of the local and regional authorities as level of government closest to the citizens and how they can promote and contribute to the consolidation of the cooperation among the states of the Organization of the Black Sea Economic Cooperation.
4. The Report benefited from the contribution by the national delegations of Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia, Greece, Romania and Turkey. In addition, the reference material has been obtained by the PABSEC International Secretariat through other related sources and publications.

II. THE ROLE OF LOCAL AUTHORITIES IN STRENGTHENING REGIONAL COOPERATION BETWEEN THE BSEC MEMBER STATES

5. The role of local authorities in the modern world has been increasing steadily. Local executive and representative bodies are getting more powers as the range of issues of local reference enriches. The new visions for governance are required in order to meet the challenges facing citizens and societies. Nowadays none of the major issues can be successfully tackled by any level of government alone. Many topical contemporary problems like unemployment, social inclusion, urban policy, rural development, migration, environment, etc. are primarily felt locally and need to be dealt with at the local level, thus, increasing the role of local authorities in securing social, economic and political justice for all citizens. Within this context, local authorities have important place in underpinning societies based on the principles of democracy, solidarity and human rights.
6. The political support at local level is one of the major elements for successful development of regional cooperation. Every city, region or territory, different in area, population, geography, wealth, cultural heritage and environment develops its own sustainable vision and builds on its own identity with the capacity to enhance regional cooperation. Implementation of shared policies for economic growth, environmental protection and social improvement at regional level increasingly involve local initiatives.
7. The BSEC Economic Agenda towards an Enhanced BSEC Partnership, which provides a roadmap outlining the framework for joint action that is needed to give new impetus to

economic regeneration in the region to further reinforce the economic dimension of the Organization with more project oriented initiatives and actions. The main priorities of the Economic Agenda are: pursuing sustainable development; strengthening the project-oriented dimension of the BSEC Organization; cooperation with international and regional organizations and institutions; intensifying intra-regional trade and investment; cooperation among the customs and border crossing administrations; establishment of efficient transport network; sustainable energy; environmental protection; food security and safety; healthcare; tourism and protection of cultural heritage; sustainable development of SME sector; closer cooperation in the field of banking and finance; information society; exchange of economic and statistical data; education; good governance and the rule of law; combating organized crime, terrorism, corruption; cooperation in emergency situations. Addressing all these priorities needs broader engagement of local authorities.

8. Local governments have wide responsibilities and the ability to develop integrated approaches in working with their communities promoting dialogue and peace through peoples' diplomacy and cooperation. The exchange of experience and knowledge between local governments, with the involvement of the communities provide significant added value to the cooperative interaction stimulating tolerance, friendship and mutual understanding.
9. For the successful implementation of national priorities it is important that all levels of executive power are involved. To this end, the role of local authorities in this process is of key importance. The practical implementation of numerous national and regional projects basically depends upon the active participation of local authorities.
10. Local authorities are integral parts of civil society and represent the most important form of democracy directly expressing the will of the people and constitute one of the foundations of the constitutional system of a democratic state. Local authorities are very close to the population knowing the needs, interests and the most pressing problems of peoples. Effective local government ensures that everyone has the opportunity to participate in decision-making process.
11. Local authorities constitute the public authority but by its nature and essence serves as self-organization of citizens. It is a powerful catalyst for enhancing civil society as a conscious participation of citizens in the development of decent living conditions promotes formation of responsibility for solving local problems increasing overall social and civil activity.
12. In a truly democratic society the local governments can initiate creation of a legal framework for strengthening the role of local authorities. Increasing the fundamental rights of all citizens, including the right to education, health care, housing, the right to work and respect for gender equality, the rights of minorities, and protection of cultural diversity are also main pillars of local government actions.
13. The strengthening of democratic local government is a prerequisite for more vigorous development and requires a balanced approach towards building its operational capacity conscious of the fact that local government is an integral part of the national structure and

national context of each country. Increased role of the regions and administrative units along with political decentralization and apportionment of powers between the state and the regions are necessary prerequisites for successful democratic development. Decentralization develops a democratic system of governance and an adequate basic service provision for, by and with the community. This process is based on general principles such as accountability, transparency, equity, predictability and the rule of law.

14. In Greece, for example, Prefectural Authorities can engage in cultural and artistic events and exchange of missions, as well as participate in or establish European or international cooperation networks, of respective or similar administrative level, aiming at the promotion of and treatment of matters of common interest, especially in the fields of development, projects' utilization, public health, emergency natural phenomena, as well as environmental protection. These collaborations and participations are held under the restriction of the respect of national and community legislation and policy, as well as the European and international obligations of the Country. These activities of Prefectural Authorities involve matters of their competences, and can develop only within the framework of national foreign policy and interstate agreements. The compatibility of their activities with national policies and the range of their competences are evaluated by a Committee, consisting of three members, which is established for that purpose with a common ministerial decision of the Ministers of Interior and Foreign Affairs.
15. It is noteworthy to mention that articles 202 and 203 of law 3852/2010 «New architecture of local government and the decentralized administration – the “Kallikrates Program”, provide for the regions the possibility to create networks and conclude international cooperation programs. In particular, article 202 provides that «...two or more regions with common features may create networks in accordance with the provisions of article 203 of the present law having the form of non-profit civil partnerships ...with a view to participating to European programs and cooperating with respective networks abroad or for other actions ...»; while article 203 provides that «...the regions may cooperate with respective local authorities as well as with other agencies abroad , in the context of their responsibilities, without prejudice to the international obligations of the country: a) at international level, to promote and facilitate interstate, interregional, trans frontier and territorial cooperation through their participation in networks of the state, regional and local authorities and other international and regional organizations and b) at the European level, with the participation in networks, programs, actions and initiatives of the EU, the Council of Europe and other European organizations. The regions may conclude agreements or create networks in order to strengthen their economic, social and territorial cohesion and participate in European Groupings of territorial cooperation.
16. Moreover, the bilateral relations developed between Greece and the BSEC Countries are also remarkable such as the Joint Inter-ministerial Cooperation Committees and the resulting Cooperation Protocols such as the Protocol between Greece and Russia on the Economic, Industrial, Technological and Scientific Cooperation (2013) and the Joint Action Plan between Greece and Russia for the period 2007-2008 (2007) and for the period 2012-2015 (2012) as well as the Cooperation Protocol between Greece and Turkey to improve cooperation on technical and administrative issues related to citizen registration issues.

17. The flow of democratic changes is rather complex and controversial due to many different factors and, first of all, still prevailing old stereotype that a state is more powerful if the authority is concentrated in the center and little autonomy is left to the regions. A «strong center – weak region» model is rather common in most of the BSEC member states and, respectively, the role of administrative units is rather modest and their voice is much insignificant at the level of international cooperation. It should be noted that strengthening of the status and powers of the administrative units and local authorities has to proceed in due regard to the national specificity (especially in case of big states).
18. The most important issue in ensuring effective involvement of local authorities is to determine the competence of its organs, especially in the context of the distribution of the rights and responsibilities between all levels of executive power. Effectiveness of a state machine depends on the rational division of responsibilities between all its levels. It is important to clearly define the competences of local authorities. It is equally important to focus on the improvement of legislation on local authorities and long-term strategic planning of socio-economic development. It is important to focus on support for small businesses, creating jobs, ensuring public control of local governments, protecting the interests of citizens and ensuring the daily needs of the population.
19. There is no doubt that prevailing unstable political climate, unresolved and protracted conflicts, continuous border disputes and acute security concerns undermine normal flow of economic activities and deprive the region from fully benefiting from the economic cooperation process. Even the countries, which are not directly involved in conflicts, suffer economic, social and political consequences of the regional instability. It is true that the resolution of political problems cannot be attributed solely in the context of local authorities. It is natural that microclimate prevailing at the local level influences in an essential way the life of the whole country and has negative impact upon the collective undertakings in the broader region. Solution of spectrum of regional problems is closely linked to the efforts for the establishment of a lasting peace and stability in the region by political means counteracting the logic of force leading to the political impasse. Within this context, it is important to develop, further formulate and implement necessary stability policies in a new sense of partnership and cooperation, based on trust, confidence and a higher level of political and economic collaboration.
20. Strengthening of cooperation among local governments in the BSEC Member States becomes important factor since it bears the opportunity for communities to interact and participate. There is an enormous range of activity and depth of commitment for maintaining links with the counterparts - between individual cities and regions - for the purpose of promoting international understanding. The local level governance, with its close contacts to its citizens is the best channel to promote regional and national policies through wide range of activities raising public awareness on the processes in the region and mobilizing public support for concrete undertakings.
21. From the very first meetings of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Black Sea Economic Cooperation, the interaction between the local authorities was placed higher on the agenda. In order to underpin the activities carried out by the BSEC countries towards integration, the PABSEC initiated cooperation among the governors and mayors of capital

cities of the Black Sea Economic Cooperation member countries in 1994. The initiative generated from the conviction that local authorities, pooling their experience and expressing their views on everyday problems encountered by citizens, may render to the regional integration process new dimension and make valuable contribution to attaining the BSEC goals and objectives.

22. Three Round-Table Meetings of the Governors and Mayors of the Black Sea Capitals were held under the auspices of the PABSEC. The first meeting in Istanbul in 1994 focused on the topical issues of infrastructural development, urbanization, social, immigration, law and public order issues, environmental problems and city twinning. The second meeting in Kyiv in 1995 tackled the topical issues of cities infrastructure and considered the prospects for future cooperation. The third meeting in Bucharest in 1998 opened a new chapter in the collaboration between the capital cities by establishing a new organization uniting the capitals of the Black Sea countries and adopted its statute. These preparatory meetings gave to its participants the opportunity to consider a number of important issues concerning the urban development and evolution of democratic municipal authorities in the BSEC states. It forged closer ties among the local authorities of the capital cities having significant role in their capacity as the economic, political and cultural centers of their countries. These meetings provided a framework for the exchange of experience towards innovative approaches and solutions for their development necessitated by the demands of the 21st century meeting the objectives of the Black Sea Economic Cooperation.
23. The initiative of the Assembly to bring closer the capital cities of the BSEC member states subsequently grew into the permanent structure of the Black Sea Capitals' Association (BSCA) as a constructive tool for providing a new dimension to the BSEC process and opening up pragmatic opportunities for intensifying support at a local level. The First BSCA Assembly was held in Ankara in 2000 dedicated to the issue of social projects for a better living demanding comprehensive response for overcome a wide range of challenges concerning city transportation, housing, communal services, developing the scientific and cultural potentials, protecting the environment, safeguarding the historical and cultural heritage, social protection, health care, schools, etc. The Second BSCA Assembly in Athens in 2001 marked an important step forward towards implementation of the goals of the Black Sea Capitals' Association and an important contribution aimed at consolidating and expanding multilateral cooperation in the Black Sea region as a whole. The debates focused on the topical subjects of international terrorism, organized crime and environmental protection stressing the determination to enhance continuously the cooperation among the capital cities of our countries in the interest of prosperity, stability and peace in the Black Sea region with a view to attaining the overall BSEC goals. The Third BSCA Assembly in Baku in 2002 fostered close cooperation among and between the capital cities of the Black Sea member states, as a constructive contribution to strengthening neighboring relations, economic integration, prosperity and stability in the region, to addressing vital issues of local governance, involvement of the citizens in to overall management of the local administration, elaboration and implementation of comprehensive economic and social programs with a direct and positive impact on the overall sustainable development. The Fourth Assembly of the BSCA in Chisinau in 2003 offered an excellent possibility for a fruitful exchange of views concerning the

strengthening of the local public authorities' role in increasing the level of services providing in the child and family domain, remarking the contribution of the participants to the related economic, social and administrative strategies. The Fifth General Assembly of the BSCA in Moscow in 2004 was devoted to the transport issues with the commitment of the participating cities to enhance their contribution to good neighborly relations, peace, prosperity and economic cooperation in the Black Sea region. The participants also expressed their will to pool efforts designed to solve economic, social and cultural problems in the region's capitals.

24. With the aim to share experiences with other cities in the region, the International Black Sea Club (IBSC) was established in 1992, in order to act together to reach common goals of strengthening business cooperation between city-ports of the Black Sea countries and contribute to higher degree of integration in the BSEC region. The IBSC unites 24 cities from nine Black Sea basin countries. Among the priorities of the IBSC are: participation in development, coordination, organization and performance of joint investment projects in the field of economy, ecology, tourism and culture; creation of conditions for free business, expansion of trade; problems solution of rational natural-resource potential usage and the Black and Azov Seas protection against pollution; and Organizational and economic, scientific and technical, commercial and cultural connections system strengthening between cities and regions of the Black Sea basin. The General Assembly of the IBSC is held once a year in the member cities. The IBSC provides the platform for the cities to carry out activities together and to be a tool to express the views and problems in order to reach common goals and aims for the benefit of the citizens. The IBSC is a non-governmental, voluntary organization which has the status of Observer in the Organization of the Black Sea Economic Cooperation and the special Consultative Status with the Economic and Social Council of the United Nations (ECOSOC). The IBSC is also a member of the International Union of Local Authorities (IULA) and the European Council for Small Business (ECSB). The last Twenty Forth Assembly was held in the city of Rostov-on-Don on 22 May 2013. IBSC Assembly adopted Declaration for support of efforts by Heads of states and governments of the Black Sea region countries towards a visa-free regime introduction, Strategy for development of International Black Sea Club for the period 2013-2018, the IBSC Statute in new addition and other work documents. In accordance with the Assembly decisions the Permanent Secretariat starts its work in Varna, Bulgaria.
25. The role of cities in the international arena is increasingly important, not only because the vast majority of the population living in urban environment, but also because the main challenges of globalization are concentrated there. Each city is the fruit of a culture and a history living and changing with its personality and its size. The municipalities build core capacities for sustainable development and underpin democratic processes and enhance cooperation through town twinning and project oriented arrangements.
26. Twinning of cities and regions by means of establishing direct contacts between the counterparts in the region contributes to the development of unity through building awareness among populations concerning concrete forms of cooperation. Twinning can enable a town and its citizens to exchange experiences, to confront problems, and to help each other in looking for solutions. Transport, protection of the environment, education,

the fight against crime, equal opportunities, initiatives for employment, etc. are the topics that twin towns work on together. Twinning is a best way of exchanging, learning, building knowledge and bringing people closer together discovering different cultures and societies.

27. According the statistics provided by the Romanian Ministry of Administration and Interior, Romania has institutionalized relations with eight BSEC member countries: Romania has 4 relations of twinning (ex.: Cluj – Korce) with *Albania*; 6 relations of twinning (ex.: Giurgiu – Russe), 8 relations of collaboration (ex. Slobozia – Silistra), 1 relation of association and 4 relations (ex. Braila – Plevna) of cooperation with *Bulgaria*; 14 relations of twinning (ex.: Constanta – Thessaloniki), 4 relations of collaboration (ex. Bucharest – Athens) with *Greece*; 32 relations of twinning (ex. Bucharest – Chisinau), 1 relation of partnership, 4 relations of cooperation, 2 relations of collaboration, 1 relation of association with *Moldova*; 5 relations of twinning, 1 relation of cooperation (ex. Bucharest – Belgrad) with *Serbia*; 2 relations of twinning (ex. Constanta – Novgorod), 3 relations of collaboration (ex. Bucharest – Moscow) with *Russian Federation*; 10 relations of twinning (ex. Bucharest – Ankara; Constanta – Istanbul), 1 relation of cooperation (ex. Bucharest – Izmir) with *Turkey*; 11 relations of twinning (ex. Constanta – Odessa), 5 relations of collaboration, 3 relations of cooperation (ex. Region of Maramures – Region Ivano Frankivsk), 1 relation of association and 2 relations of partnership with *Ukraine*.
28. According to the information from Georgia the successful cooperation among the municipalities take place between the Georgian cities with their twinning partners as follows: Rustavi-Ganja, Batumi-Aghjabadi, Telavi-Shaki (with cities of Azerbaijan); Tbilisi-Yerean Akhaltsikhe-Gyumri Batumi-Vanadzor Kobuleti-Alaverdi Kutaisi- Gyumri (with cities of Armenia); Tbilisi-Istanbul; Tbilisi-Ankara, Akhaltsikhe-Posof Rustavi-Inegol, Ckhotsku- Arhavi, Abasha-Ahdashen, Batumi-Trabzon, Batumi-Bursa (with cities of Turkey).
29. At the same time, there are some examples of joint initiatives/activities such as: (a) established activities of the city of Bucharest with other cities from the BSEC countries in the following fields: with Athens: environment, urban development, culture, economy; with Chisinau: economy, culture, education, social affairs; with Moscow: investment, environment, culture, education, youth, sports, tourism; with Belgrade: social affairs, economy, culture, commerce, urban development, environment, monuments, sports, tourism, business; with Izmir: territorial planning, energy, health, environment, mass media, culture, youth, social services; with Ankara: sustainable development, energy, mass media, culture, economy; and (b) establishment of Rouse-Giurgiu Euro region in April 2001 marked by demographic peculiarity, social trends, economic development and cultural model of both cities. It should be noted that the Rouse-Giurgiu Euroregion is a recognized member of the Association of European Border Region (AEBR) and has an important activity at national and international level. Among the euro regional expectations - collaborations with other European cities and Euro regions.
30. Several regions and municipalities of the Republic of Armenia are actively and effectively cooperating with the local authorities of the BSEC Member States. Especially large cooperation is under way with the Russian Federation. For the third time in Armenia was

held Armenia-Russia interregional forum, which was attended by all 10 provinces of Armenia, Yerevan and several other city communities, and on behalf of Russia constituent entities that are partners of the Armenian provinces and cities. As a result of the forum activities between the administrative-territorial units of the two countries the great number of documents in the field of trade and economic relations, scientific, technical and cultural cooperation were signed, as well as plans of action were elaborated.

31. In recent years cooperation between Armenia and Romania at the decentralization level has been intensified. On 24 - 28 October 2011 the delegation of mayors of the Romanian cities visited the cities of Gyumri, Dilijan, Ijevan and agreed upon the establishment of mutual cooperation. A year later, on 24-30 October 2012 the return visit of the heads of five Armenian communities to Romania, during which the five Armenian cities have signed twinning agreements with the Romanian cities - Gyumri- Pitesti, Idjevan - Gerla, Berd Focsani, Noenberyan-Dumbrave and Ayrum-Frumoasa (in May of the same year a similar agreement was signed between the Dilijan and Roman). Also it is planned to finalize the formalities for the twinning the cities of Suceava-Echmiadzin, Tirgu Okna-Vike, as well as the Romanian cities of Botoshan, Sinaia and Georgen with the Armenian cities.
32. The Azerbaijani municipalities maintain close partnership cooperation with the Union of Turkish World Municipalities. A number of events were carried out in order to study the positive experience of the member municipalities of this Union. Upon the assistance of the Union Turkish experts regularly visit Azerbaijan. In 2012 the Chair of the Municipal Cooperation Center of the Ministry of Justice was elected a co-chairman of the Union of Turkish World Municipalities. In the 2012 and 2013 the Union of Turkish World Municipalities organized in Turkey training courses for municipalities of Azerbaijan. These courses implied the lectures on the topical issues that are extremely important in the municipal activities.
33. On 21-22 September 2006 an international conference to assist in the reform of local authorities in the countries in transition development was held in Georgia in which participated the countries of the Black Sea region. This event aimed at exchange of views and experience in this area. The conference discussed the participation of citizens in the bodies of local authorities, as well as the role, functions and principles of cooperation activities in this area, the financial resources of local authorities, the need for financial decentralization, etc.
34. It should be noted that strengthening of the capacity of the local authorities and increase of status and powers of administrative units will bring more contribution to boosting cooperation between the BSEC states. Consequently, the BSEC has to concentrate more attention to providing overall support for strengthening the capacity of the local authorities and increase of the role of the regions based upon the European and global experience.
35. The BSEC Member States are well familiar with the European approach that the regions are a pillar for democracy. All 12 BSEC states are party to the European Charter of Local Self-Government (entered into force in 1988) which has been used as a major guideline for establishing basic local government legislation and serves together with the European

Convention on Human Rights as a prerequisite for the accession of Council of Europe member states.

36. The Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe established in 1994 serves a consultative body comprising two chambers (*the Chamber of Local Authorities and the Chamber of Regions*) consisting of elected representatives from local and regional authorities in the Council's member states (*including all 12 BSEC member states*). This organization provides a forum where local and regional elected representatives discuss common problems, pool their experience and express their views to governments; cooperates closely with national and international organizations representing local and regional government; organizes hearings and conferences at local and regional levels to reach a wider public whose involvement is essential to a working democracy; prepares regular country-by-country reports on the state of local and regional democracy in all the Council's member and applicant states and monitors, in particular, how the principles of the European Charter of Local Self Government are being implemented. The Congress develops initiatives to enable citizens to participate effectively in local and regional democracy; represents the interests of local and regional government in the shaping of European policy; encourages regional and cross-border cooperation for peace, tolerance and sustainable development; encourages the setting up of Euro-regions; observes local and regional elections.
37. The Chamber of Local Authorities of the Congress concentrates mainly on studying the situation of local democracy and on observing local elections in the Council of Europe member states. The Chamber also deals with societal issues and encourages initiatives promoting cohesion in European towns and cities. Citizen participation, intercultural dialogue, e-democracy and respect for equality and diversity are examples of the areas in which it works. It also endeavours to promote the principles of local democracy outside Europe, inter alia through Euro-Arab dialogue between cities and Euro-Mediterranean co-operation. Twice a year, during the sessions of the Congress, the Chamber of Local Authorities meets to consider substantive and current issues relating to the local dimension in Europe. Its Bureau meets regularly, holding discussions and preparing draft recommendations and resolutions to be submitted for adoption during sessions. Among the main projects of the Congress are: The European Network of Training Organizations for Local and Regional Authorities (ENTO) providing expert help and training for central and east European nations; *Prix Europa* competition in the cultural field, which promotes the best of European television and radio across national boundaries, illustrating Europe's cultural diversity and encouraging program exchanges; and *the projects* for strengthening local democracy and cross-border cooperation in south-eastern Europe following up Stability Pact activities.
38. The European Union forms a dense network of institutional, social and political relationships which has become even richer in the context of an enlarged Europe and will continue to do so in the context of future enlargements implying the BSEC member states. The European Union lately put forth measures to bring European Union and its institutions closer to the citizens of the member states and encouraged the EU institutions to promote citizens' participation in public life and in decision-making process. The European Commission has adopted the proposal for a new program "Citizens for Europe

2007-2013". This program is aimed at activities that involve and promote direct exchanges between European citizens through their participation in town twinning activities. It implies that there is a need for better information of citizens about European institutions and that the citizens should be aware of their duties and become actively involved in the process of European integration. The challenge of bridging the gap between citizens and the European institutions is closely linked to another challenge, that of strengthening cohesion among Europeans.

39. The Council of European Municipalities and Regions (CEMR) is the oldest and broadest organization of local and regional government in Europe uniting national associations of local and regional authorities from 40 European countries. The CEMR works to promote a united Europe that is based on local and regional self-government and democracy. Since its creation in 1951, CEMR promotes the construction of a united, peaceful and democratic Europe founded on local self-government, respect for the principle of subsidiarity and the participation of citizens. The work is organised around two main pillars: 1. influencing European policy and legislation in all areas having an impact on municipalities and regions; 2. providing a forum for debate between local and regional authorities via their national representative associations. CEMR is also the European section of the world organisation United Cities and Local Governments (UCLG), through which it represents the European local and regional government on the international stage. CEMR has developed its unique town twinning network. Today, there are numerous twinning projects linking towns from all over Europe.
40. The Assembly of European Regions (AER) is the largest independent network of regional authorities in wider Europe, bringing together nearly 230 regions from 35 countries along with 15 interregional organisations (including all the BSEC Member States). Established in 1985, AER is a forum for interregional co-operation and a lobbyist for regional interests on the European stage: AER was a key player in the creation of the advisory bodies to the Council of Europe (Congress of Local and Regional Authorities) and the European Union (Committee of the Regions). The AER member regions vary in size, economic wealth and competences according to their respective countries. The AER transforms this diversity into strength and an element of cohesion for the regions, a reflection of the political reality of Europe. Right from the beginning, the AER has been committed to promoting regionalism and to institutionalizing the regions' participation in European politics. The creation of the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of Europe by the Council of Europe in 1994 followed by the creation of the Committee of the Regions by the European Union in 1995, may serve as proof of these principles in action. The AER promotes the increase of the political role of the regions in Europe, contributes to the development of interregional and cross-border cooperation, encourages the integration of regional elected representatives and civil servants, and develops regional initiatives in favor of cultural diversity.
41. Cooperation between the local governments acquires more support at global arena. There is a growing trend throughout the world that local authorities play a major role in international cooperation and bring substantial contribution to the development processes. The partnership between the local levels of government has been established through the World Charter of Local Self-Government, setting out the guidance of all national

governments and international agencies and the basic principles which should underlie any democratic local government system – a joint initiative of the World Assembly of Cities and Local Authorities (WACLA) and the United Nations Conference on Human Settlements (UNCHS). Local self-government is seen in the global context as a vital component of the development process.

42. Local governments have developed great experience and interest in relations with counterparts from around the world. United Cities and Local Governments (UCLG) represents and defends the interests of local governments on the world stage, regardless of the size of the communities they serve. Headquartered in Barcelona, the organization's stated mission is: to be the united voice and world advocate of democratic local self-government, promoting its values, objectives and interests, through cooperation between local governments, and within the wider international community. UCLG's work program focuses on: increasing the role and influence of local government and its representative organizations in global governance; becoming the main source of support for democratic, effective, innovative local government close to the citizen; ensuring an effective and democratic global organization. United Cities and Local Governments supports international cooperation between cities and their associations, and facilitates programs, networks and partnerships to build the capacities of local governments. The organization promotes the role of women in local decision-making, and is a gateway to relevant information on local government across the world. At present the President of the UCLG is the Mayor of Istanbul Mr. Kadir Topbas.

Role of the National Parliaments

43. The present stage of development of cooperation in the Black Sea region reveals the need for greater involvement of national parliaments in promoting the integral role of local authorities in mobilizing support and contribution at a local level for the enhancement of regional cooperation process.
44. The parliaments have to put every effort to make maximum use of the available legal instruments to ensure observation of human rights, democratic principles and the rule of law, which ultimately underpins bilateral and multilateral relations between the states and is a prerequisite for sustainable economic and social development and growth.
45. The national parliaments need to pay more attention to the upgrading, where necessary, of the existing legal and regulatory frameworks with a view to introduce more systematic and effective methods of citizen participation and development of strong and effective democratic local governance.
46. National parliaments have to mobilize public support for implementation of the multilateral BSEC projects and to monitor the ratification process of the multilateral documents adopted by the Council of Ministers of Foreign Affairs, thus encouraging actions speeding up the economic integration in the region.
47. National parliaments also have to speed up ratification of international instruments pertinent to sustainable development and integration and to incorporate their provisions into the national legislation.

48. At the same time, the PABSEC has to recommend the national parliaments to develop legislative acts facilitating multilateral economic cooperation, speeding up economic, political and social reforms and whenever possible to approximate and harmonize them with European legislation and standards.
49. Parliaments have to take an active role in supporting establishment of the direct contacts between the local authorities in the Black Sea region, facilitating and sustaining undertakings at local level as a significant component of the consolidating regional cooperation process.

III. CONCLUSIONS

50. There is a growing consensus in the world that local authorities, with the privilege of proximity with their elected representatives, is best positioned to safeguard and disseminate the values of democracy, friendship and mutual understanding. Local governments possess possibilities to improve a dialogue between the state, citizens and communities, thus bringing immense contribution to promoting peoples' diplomacy and good neighborly relations.
51. Aspiration of the Black Sea countries towards establishing peace, prosperity and stability in the region has to be tied in with a coherent strategy of partnership and coordination with due regard to the strengthening of the role of local government as an important link for bridging friendship and cooperation among the Black Sea peoples.
52. The capacity of the local governments varies from country to country as their role is more important in federal states. Yet, the role of local government in domestic and external affairs remains rather weak within the unitary states.
53. It is important that the status and powers of the administrative units and local authorities are enhanced and strengthened with due regard to the national context. It is equally important to develop and deepen direct contacts between cities and regions of individual states, like twinning of cities and regions, laying basis for consolidation of friendship and mutual trust between states and nations.
54. Twinning and partnership concept gives opportunity to find out more about the citizens in other countries, to exchange experiences, and to develop joint projects on issues of common interest, such as local integration, the environment, economic development, and cultural differences. Twinning and cooperation at local government level underpin democratization processes and promote understanding for different viewpoints. It is in this respect that the Black Sea region states have to draw more attention to fully explore twinning potential in the region in order to facilitate strengthening of cultural and economic ties at local level providing a solid foundation for strengthening cooperation at regional level.
55. Local governments, taking action in solidarity for meeting the aspirations of peoples in towns and villages, as well as in central and peripheral regions, can add their voice in maintaining peace and political stability in the region. Despite the diversity of regions,

shared initiatives and projects can allow particularities to be bypassed and shared values to become a source of mobilization.

56. It is important to ensure that a more appropriate role is given to local authorities that should realize their full potential in promoting better and more efficient regional cooperation. The PABSEC is convinced that more active participation of local authorities will lay the groundwork for more effective implementation by the Member States of their tasks towards enhancement of economic, political, social and cultural integration in the region.
57. With this in mind, PABSEC has to interact with the BSEC and its Related Bodies for efficient implementation of the “BSEC Economic Agenda towards an Enhanced BSEC Partnership”, which represents the common program of actions for the member states for the future.
58. This reveals the need for greater involvement of national parliaments in promoting the integral role of local governments in mobilizing public support. To this end, the aspiration of the Black Sea countries towards establishing peace, prosperity and stability in the region has to be tied in with a coherent strategy of partnership and coordination with due regard to the strengthening of the role of local authorities as an important link for bridging friendship and cooperation among the Black Sea peoples.