

CONFERENCE REPORT

**13-14 December 2022
Athens, Greece**



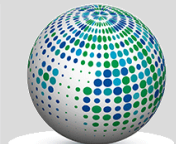
**BALKANS
& BLACK SEA
FORUM**

**ATHENS-GREECE
13-14 DECEMBER
2022**

Athens Acropolis Museum

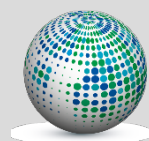
**“ The Eurasian nexus post 2022:
high-stakes arena for security,
trade and investments ”**

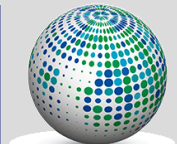




The Balkans & Black Sea Forum (BBSF), established in 2017, constitutes an independent economic platform and a pivotal hub for leading business- & policymakers committed to enhancing stability, growth and cooperation across the Balkan and Black Sea regions.

Distinguished speakers and prominent influencers from the public and private sectors engage and interact to review challenges, assess implications, identify opportunities and explore innovative ways for promoting security, sustainable development and bi/multilateral cooperation.





After an obligatory hiatus of two years due to the recent pandemic, the 4th edition of the Balkans & Black Sea Forum took place in the emblematic Acropolis Museum in Athens, on 13-14 December 2022 with the participation of numerous political leaders, secretaries general of International Organizations, ambassadors, policy makers, academics and other high-level experts.

Highlighting “The Eurasian nexus post 2022: high-stakes arena for security, trade and investments”, the BBSF2022 paved the way for a sincere, coherent and constructive dialogue, needed today more than ever before, as the recent events in Eastern Europe led to a new and dangerously destabilizing situation, the dire consequences of which are still to be defined.

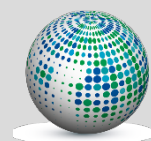
Official partners of the Balkans & Black Sea Forum 2022 were UN Women and the Organization of the Black Sea Economic Cooperation (BSEC), leading sponsors the Piraeus Port Authority SA and Cosco Shipping; and it was held under the auspices of the Hellenic Ministries of Foreign Affairs, Energy & Environment and of Development & Investments.

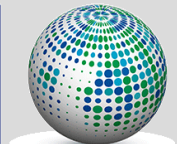
Author

Ambassador (a.h.) Michael B. Christides

Co-Chair, Organizing Committee

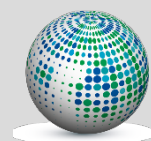
Balkans & Black Sea Forum

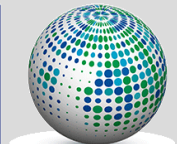




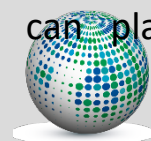
The BBSF2022 was divided into 6 main Chapters referring to:

- **Chapter 1:** Energy Supply & Security, Environmental Commitments in a World of Sanctions & Disruptions.
- **Chapter 2:** Innovation, Technology, Financing, Investments at serving society.
- **Chapter 3:** Regional cooperation - integration based on the economic geography of the regions.
- **Chapter 4:** Connectivity - Infrastructure, the ever-growing need for new Investments.
- **Chapter 5:** Investing in gender innovation to build sustainable economies.
- **Chapter 6:** Global convulsions and their impact on the Balkans and the Black Sea region.





1. Regional cooperation should be enhanced and more focused on the needs of the citizens, whose voices should be better heard at the decision-making centers.
2. Inspired and inspiring leadership is missing in many pivotal States and democratic values suffer considerable setbacks in many parts of our small globe. This must change.
3. Greater efforts to observe the global UN SDGs should be undertaken by the public & private sector, in order to meet the commitments assumed by all.
4. Concrete measures must be adopted to bypass gender employment barriers; innovative legislation and more funds are needed to allow the participation of women in higher places of employment and encourage them to become entrepreneurs.
5. China's BRI constitutes a useful tool to further facilitate trade and other exchanges, if the principles of transparency, fair competition and feasibility analysis are maintained and respected.
6. The transition to renewable sources of energy should be further accelerated and sustainable innovative technology should find its way faster and more effectively in the everyday life of all.
7. While the EU continues to remain the focal point of attraction for States in the Western Balkans and in the broader neighborhood, it must undergo significant reforms, if it wishes to play an adequate role on the international scene and to participate in the construction of the future global security architecture.
8. Common sense is needed to address even minor impediments that decisively obstruct the swift and smooth road transport of goods across the borders of many States; digitalization of procedures and attracting (through better conditions) more drivers, can play a significant role in improving road transports.



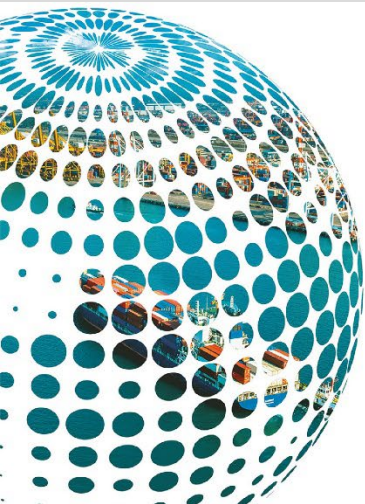
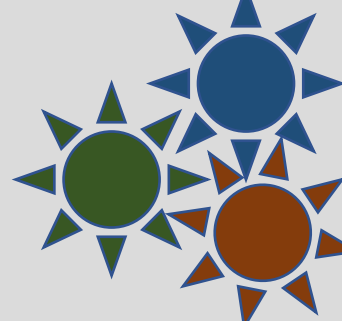
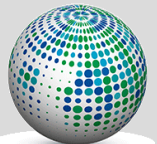
The Leading Port in the Mediterranean
Top in Europe
One of the most significant in the world

Our Port of Piraeus in an era of change

With steady large scale investments
and modernization of all business sectors,
the Port is transforming into one of the most significant hubs
in the Mediterranean and Europe.

**A project of great significance and value for its shareholders
and the Greek society.**



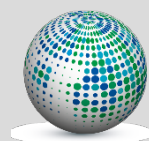
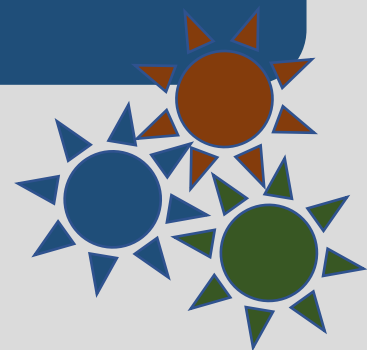


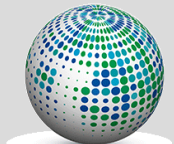
CHAPTER 1

10.30 - 12.00

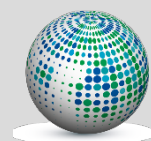
Energy supply & security in a World of sanctions & disruptions

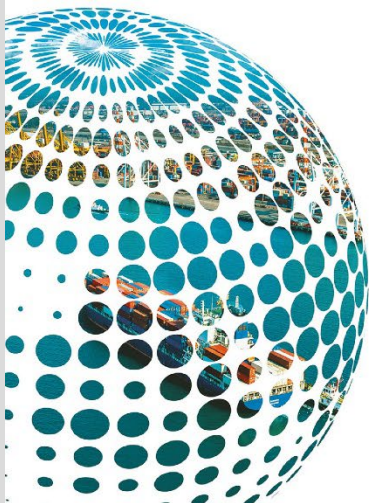
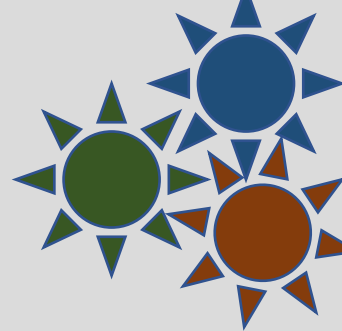
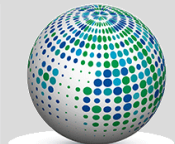
“Coordination & cooperation among states in the region are of vital importance in addressing the new, precarious energy security environment and the serious challenges ahead, as they try to secure alternative sources of energy”





- The war in Ukraine has created a totally new energy supply situation with the various governments responding through policy changes and the widespread provision of subsidies. Most countries in the region have responded fast and vigorously to the new challenges, following the change of the energy security environment. Hence, the economic and social fallout has been minimal, although the cost is rising as the energy crisis continues.
- However, there is a marked absence of incentives especially in the energy efficiency area which, if provided, could affect energy demand and alleviate the stress on resources. Governments need to work more on that area and commit additional resources.
- The great energy dependency of most countries in the Balkans & Black Sea region appears as a key common parameter which influences so many other areas, including economic development, security of supply and affordable energy prices for consumers.
- With natural gas having emerged over the last 10-15 years as a strategic fuel, very much necessary for the functioning of the energy systems in most of the countries in the region, suppliers and supply routes have gained extraordinary importance. In this context, countries are asked to coordinate and cooperate in addressing the new energy security environment and the challenges ahead, as they and the West are trying to diversify energy imports in gas, crude oil, oil products and in coal.



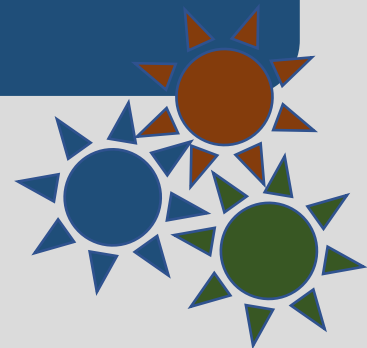


CHAPTER 2

12.30 - 14.00

Innovation & Technology serving society

“Governments must focus on and generously fund the seamless introduction of innovation and technology that will facilitate the sustainable development of the economies and the wellbeing of the people”

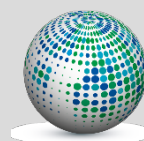


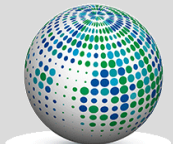
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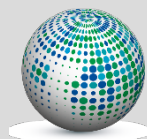
“The Eurasian nexus post 2022
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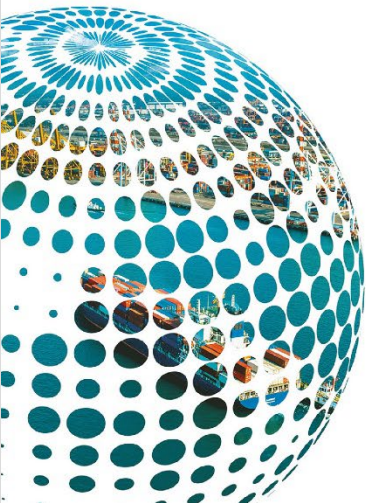
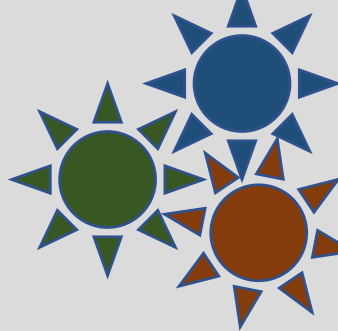
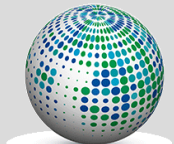
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Acropolis Museum





- The aim of this Chapter was to introduce the social dimension of technology and innovation, i.e., the ways in which the common good is better served through the relevant policies to be implemented.
- The need to introduce and apply a legal framework aiming expressly to facilitate technology development and innovation was underlined, starting with the legislation of special/super-deduction tax rates and going all the way to creating innovation centers and competence clusters, for an integrated approach to growth.
- Speakers elaborated on initiatives undertaken to develop clean energies and diversify energy supply, as well as to generate employment and, thus, relieve social pressures internally. The introduction of relevant institutional reforms was also mentioned.



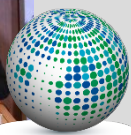
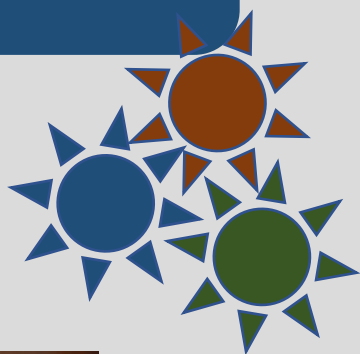


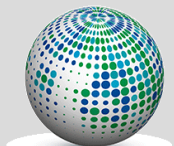
CHAPTER 3

15.00 - 16.30

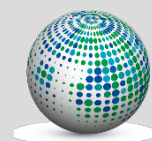
Regional cooperation-integration based
on the economic geography of the regions

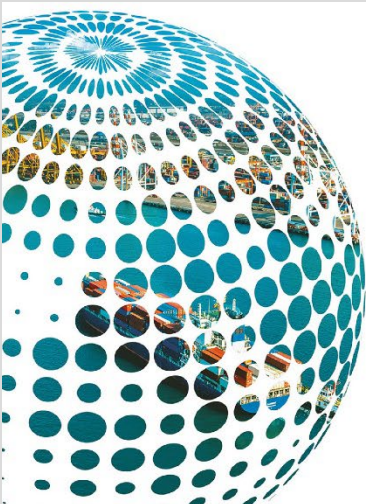
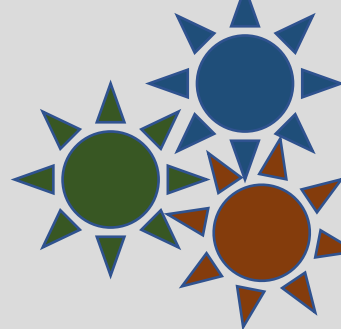
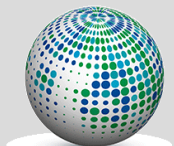
“Regional cooperation and coordination remain primary tools for sustainable development and broader geographic integration”





- Regional actors, who experience every day the realities on the ground, should be heard loud and clear.
- Greater efforts to observe the global UN SDGs should be undertaken by the public & private sector, in order to meet the commitments assumed by all.
- “Europe”, either as a “European perspective” or as a concept of closer integration to the “European core”, needs more than the introduction of institutional reforms and/or legal framework adaptations: it needs their continuous and steady implementation. While the pull of “Europe” is strongly felt throughout the region, one should not miss the fact that two other major attraction forces remain in play and are increasingly felt: the U.S. and China. In today’s geopolitically tense times, as well as in economically critical situations like the one of the energy-cum-inflation shocks, similar forces are even more present.
- It is imperative to facilitate the accessibility of all European regions and those of neighboring countries, so that no region feels marginal. Regions should be helped to receive and integrate migrants and refugees throughout periods of crises. Support to and solidarity with countries in extraordinary emergencies should be provided from the very first moments, at the same time the formulation of plans for reconstruction should be underway.
- Countries of the region should be encouraged to better capitalize on the opportunities afforded to them by the very fact of the regional – Balkan and Black Sea – setting; these regional opportunities exist, they should be sought out, patiently and constantly.



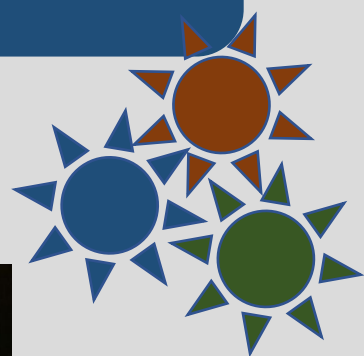


CHAPTER 4

17.00 - 18.30

Connectivity & Infrastructure, the
ever-growing need for new investments

“The Balkan and Black Sea regions urgently need generous direct investments in modern, integrated infrastructure projects, that will make ample use of global digital tools”

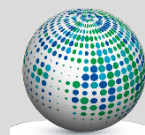


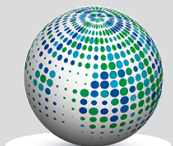
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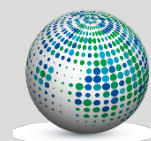
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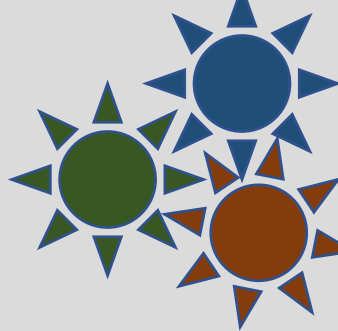
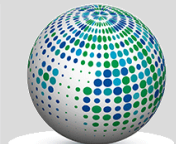
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- Concerning land-transports in the wider region, increasing trade and the concentration of that trade to fewer borders due to the war in Ukraine are putting pressure on border crossings and cause serious congestion, as well as long waiting times. To facilitate trade and ease border crossings by reducing the congestion at borders in the Balkan & Black Sea regions, more investment is needed, in both hard and soft solutions.
- Digitalization is the key to easing cross-border operations, and global digital tools, such as eTIR and e-CMR, which are available today should be used. Yet 70% of the Balkan countries and the majority of BSEC countries have not yet taken the first basic step of signing the e-CMR protocol. All unnecessary and costly border procedures, repetitive customs controls, and time-consuming procedures in the Black Sea region should be removed and modern formalities should be put into practice.
- We cannot strive to reduce CO₂ emissions while trucks waste fuel inching ahead, ever so slowly, idling in seemingly never-ending queues on almost all border crossings. The solutions exist, and we should implement them without further delay. The time has come for strong political will and action, not words.
- The "Belt and Road" Initiative has become a “popular global public good” and an international cooperation platform in which the countries of the Balkans and the Black Sea region play a significant role.



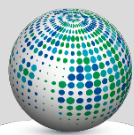
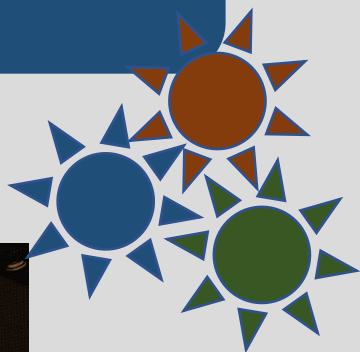


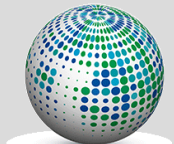
CHAPTER 5

10.15 - 11.30

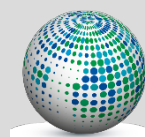
Investing in gender innovation to build sustainable economies

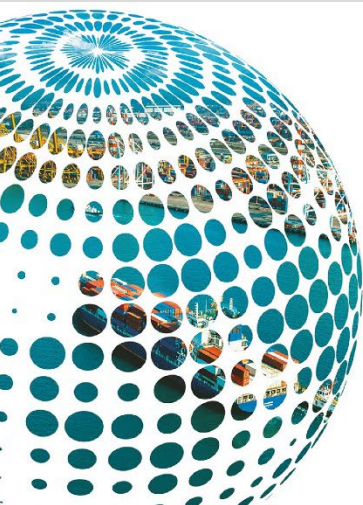
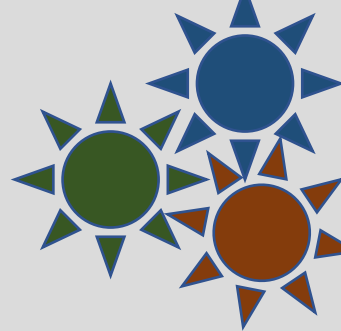
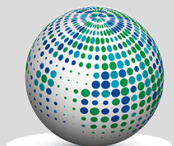
“Sustainable economies will only flourish with the active participation and involvement of the “other” half of the world’s population, namely women”





- Concrete measures must be adopted to bypass gender employment barriers; innovative legislation and more funds are needed to allow the participation of women in higher places of employment and encourage them to become successful entrepreneurs.



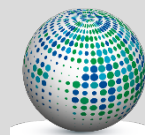
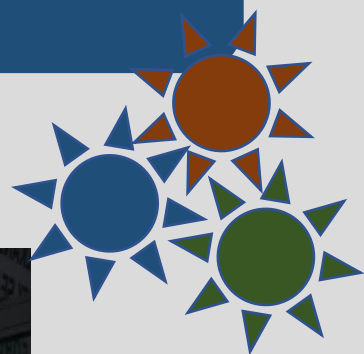


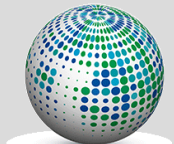
CHAPTER 6

12.00 - 13.30

**Global convulsions and their impact on
the Balkans and the Black Sea region**

"A new global arrangement is urgently needed in order to guarantee the prevalence of dialogue and understanding among states, thus avoiding pushing the world to the brink of a global catastrophe"





- The seriousness of the unstable and uncertain situation prevailing globally today was emphasised, together with the grave concern because the epicentre of tension and conflict is again planted in the broader Southeast European region.
- Concerning the EU, the importance of the Common Foreign and Security Policy as well as the Common Security and Defence Policy were underlined, focusing on EU'S continued support to UA: upholding the UN Charter, International Law and our stability in Europe, focusing on the Western Balkans and the Black Sea region. The global work to mitigate the impact of the war in terms of energy supplies, food supply chain and connectivity was stressed.
- With the expansion of enlargement dynamics to the East, including the European perspective for Georgia, the Black Sea has acquired a new potential - it has moved closer to the EU and a range of new opportunities have opened for the region. EU's connectivity agenda and the new imperative of diversification of energy and transport connectivity away from Russia means new opportunities for the Caucasus to become a hub for energy and connectivity between Europe and Asia. This gives the Black Sea a new geo strategic angle. For the coming years, Global Gateway (GG) will be a key EU foreign policy tool.
- Key investments are being made in GG's first year of implementation to boost digital connectivity through underwater data cable and terrestrial connections between the EU and its partners, to increase energy renewable production with investments in solar plants and wind farms and to increase for example access and manufacturing capacity of vaccines, medicines and health technologies.
- China and the EU should adhere to their two-way openness, break down barriers, maintain the stability and smooth operation of the global industrial and supply chains, promote trade and investment while facilitating their liberalization, and jointly lead the global post-pandemic recovery and prosperity by providing stability in a world that is much more turbulent today.



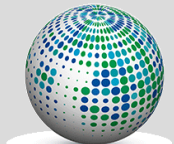
Geo Routes and **Aegean Routes** eco & cultural heritage journeys that held under the auspices of the HNC for UNESCO are made for experienced voyagers willing to explore, experience and be a part of the cultural heritage of Greece. Geo Routes aims at highlighting the legends of Greece, facilitating to the intercultural dialogue and contributing to the sustainable development of the local societies by cultural, environmental, educational and experiential activities.



Geo Routes off the beaten track journeys highlighting:

- **Athens** (11 trips: The Engineering of the Parthenon, The Battle of Marathon, Dining at Home, The Mines of Lavrion, The Underground Treasures of Athens, Byzantine Iconography, In the footsteps of Socrates, Secrets of Athens, Sailing to Aegina Island, Wine Tasting in Ancient Nemea, Dafni Monastery),
- **Mainland Greece** (10 trips: Nauplia – Ancient Epidaurus, Mountainous Corinthia "the 6th labor of Hercules", Mount Pelion "The Centaurs Mountain", Mt. Olympus 'Feast with Gods', Karpenisi "The Invasion of Gauls", Olympic Heritage, Arcadian Legacy, West Macedonia Panorama, Serres "The Land of Alexander the Great", Spartans Legacy) and the
- **Greek Islands** (4 trips: Amorgos island 'Deep Blue', Mysteries of Kythera, Hiking in West Crete, Sailing in North Cyclades).





The many sober conclusions reached during the BBSF2022 can – and should! - inspire a greater and more effective involvement of all states in the Balkans & the Black Sea region to preserve peace, promote the sustainable development of their economies and establish a long and solid tradition of regional cooperation & partnership.

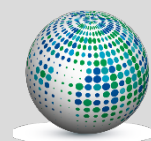
We all must vigorously react to today's intolerable reality where a senseless war, tragic human loss, and utter material destruction in the heart of Europe have become an accepted, daily-routine “fact-of-life”! We have arrived at a point where politicians and analysts argue that “the continuation of warfare is for the time being the only way that could lead to the potential start of peace diplomacy”, whereas conventional wisdom always implied swift and earnest negotiations as the only path for avoiding or stopping a destructive war of attrition, like the one in Ukraine.

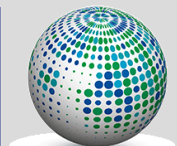
It is the hope of all that by the time the Balkans & Black Sea Forum convenes for its 5th edition (February 2024), a period of security, stability, sustainable development, and cooperation will have been well established in this geostrategic region of our small world.

To that end the BBSF stands ready to continue its valuable contribution.

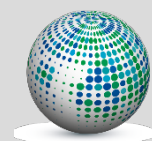
Giannis Balakakis
Chair
Organizing Committee

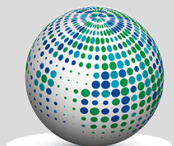
Ambassador (a.h) Michael B. Christides
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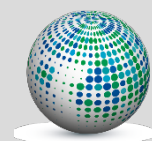


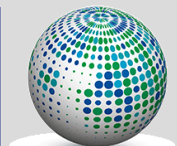
1. H.E. Željka Cvijanović, Chair of the Presidency of Bosnia and Herzegovina
2. Ambassador Angelina Eichhorst, Managing Director Europe, European External Action Service
3. Ms. Alia El-Yassir, Regional Director, UN Women Office for Europe & Central Asia
4. Ms. Eleni Marianou, Secretary General, Conference of Peripheral Maritime Regions
5. Ambassador Lazar Comanescu, Secretary General, Organization of the Black Sea Economic Cooperation
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15. Mr. Erik Holmgren, Economic Counselor, Embassy of the United States of America
16. Mr. Wouter Zweers, Research Fellow-EU & Global Affairs Unit, Clingendael Institute of the Netherlands





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30. Mr. Michael Dritsas, Head of Cabinet of the Dpt. Minister Christos Dimas
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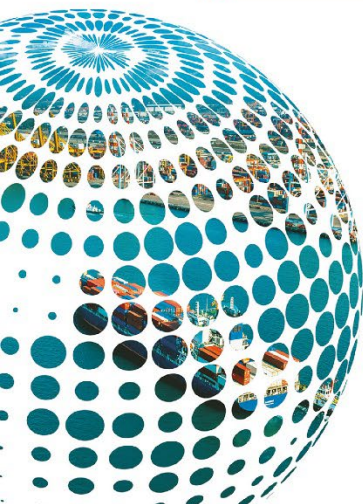
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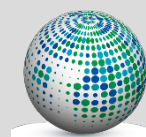
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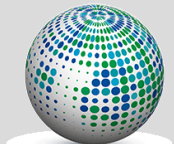


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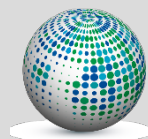


Balkans & Black Sea Forum – 2023 executive roundtable

- *Date: 5 July 2023*
- *Place: Athens, The Athenian Club*
- *Title: The role of Greece in the Balkan and the Black Sea regions*
- *Sessions: 4 - Speakers: 30*
- *Language: Greek with simultaneous translation to English*
- *By invitation only*

5th International Balkans & Black Sea Forum 2024

- *Dates: 15-16 February 2024*
- *Place: Athens*
- *Title: Leadership, Security, Cooperation in a fragmented world*
- *Sessions: 7 - Speakers: 35*
- *Language: English*



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