

President Lacny, Secretary General Martin Marmy, Ambassador Kaklikis, Distinguished Delegates to the General Assembly of IRU,

We are living in a phase of decline of our civilization, a decline that is hopefully temporary. The decline has been mainly fueled by enhanced human greed, which constitutes the main cause of the global financial crisis and by the inability of leaders and politicians to communicate among themselves. This inability is a global phenomenon and visible everywhere. At the UN, the EU, Ministerial meetings, Summits, everywhere that leaders, politicians and government officials attend. Each one makes his statement and departs without listening to what the others have to say. Thus they do not enrich themselves with the knowledge of the others. The participants in most International or Regional Organizations, in the process of negotiating texts, often forget that the objective of the texts is that their results should reach the people that they represent, and make an effective difference to their lives. Paper negotiations should not be a futile exercise to prove who dominates whom on a piece of paper.

BSEC and IRU, through their close cooperation have achieved, as much as possible, to make our presence felt to our peoples, not by propaganda but by visible infrastructure projects in the area of transport.

In September 2006 in Sochi, we signed with IRU our cooperation agreement which is being implemented to the fullest and even more. It was in Sochi that the BSEC Ministers of Transport finally agreed to finalize the MOU on the Black Sea Ring Highway (BSRH), which was signed in Belgrade in April 2007. From Belgrade that April we launched the BSRH caravan of 12 trucks, that went around the highway to promote it and to report practical problems. This caravan inspired the Silk Road Caravan, which was jointly done between IRU and ECO and was much more dangerous than ours. In December 2008 the MOU of the BSRH came into force and started to be implemented. Work is in progress. Turkey has already done its part by completing the highway between Georgia and Istanbul. Greece finishes the Egnatia Highway, thus allowing Albanian trucks to easily access the BSRH.

But we did not stop there. In 2009 we came up with the idea of the BSEC Permit. This permit would be used for a single road trip only and the trucks holding such a permit are allowed to transit through all territories of the participating states without having to present any other bilateral permit. With the technical and financial assistance of IRU and BSEC-URTA we launched this pilot project in January. Last month it was decided to extend it for another year. BSEC is the only regional organization of the world to use such a system. And we are proud of it.

BSEC could not have done anything without this unique cooperation with IRU and BSEC-URTA. We listened to each other, we consulted each other and we cared for our peoples.

My thanks go to you Martin Marmy, SG Of IRU for your strong support and inspiration in our joint endeavours. I also appreciate and am thankful to the SG of BSEC-URTA Mr Haydar Ozkan, for your practical inputs to our brainstorming sessions that led to the creation of the Caravan and to the launching of the BSEC Permit project. Last but not least, many thanks to

Adrian Albu the Deputy SG of BSEC-URTA who among his many achievements, was also group leader of the Black Sea Caravan and who risked his life last month while driving through Afghanistan as group leader of the Silk Road Caravan. I am also honored by the presence here today of the representative of the Hellenic Chairman in Office of BSEC, HE Ambassador George Kaklikis, Permanent Representative of Greece to the UN.

Thank you for awarding me with the Order of Merit of IRU, which I humbly accept.