



**INTERNATIONAL PERMANENT SECRETARIAT
BLACK SEA UNIVERSITIES NETWORK**

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Distinguished Mr. Minister,

Magnificent Rectors,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I would like to congratulate Rector Elmar Gasimov, from the Baku Higher Oil School and a member of the BSUN Executive Board, for the initiative to organize such a meeting that is just in time and shall be very useful for exchanging ideas and initiating joint projects!

As BSUN, we have followed the evolution of the COVID-19 pandemic and we have tried to offer a platform for cooperation and support, in the format of the following events:

- on 13th of April, 2020, it was organized the BSUN e-Conference on: "Solutions to Address the Impact of SARS CoV2 Pandemics on the Higher Education Activities";
- on 28th of April, 2020, it was organized the BSUN e-Conference on: "Addressing the Impact of SARS CoV2 Pandemics on the Higher Education Activities in the Black Sea Region";
- on 14th of May, 2020, the Black Sea Universities Network, in partnership with the Institute for Advanced Studies in Levant Culture and Civilization Center of Excellence organized the e-Conference on: "How will the World look like after the Pandemic?";
- on 18th of June, 2020, it was organized a BSUN - UNICA Joint Webinar on "The Impact of COVID-19 on Universities".

The events that have been organized facilitated the initiation of some pilot projects as followings:

- The University of Bucharest, in partnership with the “Stefan S. Nicolau” Institute of Virology of the Romanian Academy and the “Matei Bals” Institute of Infectious Diseases, carried out a research project to evaluate the transmissibility potential of the SARS-CoV-2 virus, from different types of surfaces with a focus on the food surfaces that could not be washed or treated as it is the case of fresh bread and bakery.

The researchers have demonstrated that the presence of the virus can be detected for many hours after being infected and at present the activities are concentrating on the duration of the infectious potential of the viruses on those surfaces and how it may be inhibited;

- At the “Politehnica” University of Bucharest, at the Faculty of Computer Science and Automation, a team of researchers developed a project on the use of artificial intelligence for evaluating the transmissibility of the SARS-CoV-2 virus in a community of students being in physical contact in a classroom or in a community of customers of a supermarket.

The results of the research have been made public and at present it is under evaluation the possibility of extending the research scope by the involvement of larger groups of researchers.

During the different waves of the pandemic, it has been evident that the universities must take into consideration a new dimension of the university management, namely the “University Resilience” that is referring to the capability of a higher education institution to continue the primary mission of education, research and service, despite potentially disruptive events that might be the case of pandemics, natural disasters, major social movements and other similar situations.

To build university resilience, the universities from the Black Sea region have to organize specific actions and task forces and fortunately, in many BSUN member universities there is such a knowledge, there are experts that have studied the scientific background and applied for many different situations, aspects related to forecasting, evaluations of risks and vulnerabilities, development of worst-case scenarios, contingency plans and the use of serious games.

The BSUN IPS, under the guidance of the BSUN Presidential Troika and of the BSUN Executive Board, would like to facilitate the contacts between the interested universities and to orchestrate different joint activities on the topic of “University Resilience”, starting with some pilot projects.

Another aspect that was extremely evident during the COVID-19 pandemic it was the need for putting a fundamental emphasis on the health and the quality of the habitat. For this reason, BSUN put a much more emphasis on the implementation of the UN 2030 Sustainable Development Goals in the Black Sea Region and specific focus on Blue Growth initiative in the Black Sea Region.

The Conferences that have been organized in 2020 and this year, the cooperation with different organizations like the SDSN, the involvement in large regional projects like Black Sea CONNECT, offer us the possibility to cooperate with the member universities and to support their efforts to develop teaching and scientific research activities in this field.

The recently initiated BSUN Master Courses on Blue Growth, as part of the BSUN MOOC on Blue Growth in the Black Sea Region, is a model that we would like to explore for offering a reference to the member universities on how to share education resources for building excellence and flexibility in education.

In the next period we are planning activities targeting the organization of an Observatory for Scientific Research Open Data on Blue Growth in the Black Sea region, a platform for virtual hackathons, a repository for serious games on Blue Growth in the Black Sea region and activities that are intending to address the involvement of students.

We are sure that based on the outcomes of this event that is organized today, there will be other initiatives that will be proposed and we are ready to support any kind of idea that could contribute to the boosting of inter-university cooperation for building resilience and safety in our region!

Thank you for your attention!

Prof. Dr. Eden MAMUT

BSUN Secretary General