OPEN LETTER

To:
Victor Tvirzun, BSEC Secretary General
Kyrylo Tretiak, PBSEC Secretary General
David Usupashvili, PABSEC President
Zefi Dimadama, ICBSS Executive Director
Ministers of Foreign Affairs of BSEC Member States
Ministers of social affairs (in charge of children issues) in the BSEC Member States

From: ChildPact, The Regional Coalition for Child Protection in the Wider Black Sea Area

Re:

Starting from a common ground: the belief in the values of regional cooperation
BSEC is the only treaty-based intergovernmental organisation in the wider Black Sea area that has a clear mandate for promoting regional cooperation. This is a valuable asset for such a diverse region like ours.

Similarly to BSEC within the civil society sphere, ChildPact (www.childpact.org) is the only entity with a clear objective ¹ for promoting stronger regional cooperation. ChildPact is a regional coalition that brings together more than 600 NGOs working with more than 500,000 vulnerable children.

We at ChildPact believe that societies should invest in children not only as a moral duty, but also for economic reasons. Economists show that a growing and skilled labour force is fundamental for economic development in the long-term. The children of today are not only consumers (benefiting from services and goods through their parents or caretakers), but they are the future labour force, the future taxpayers and the future economic trend-setters. BSEC’s interest to promote economic growth is fundamentally linked in the long term with the situation of today’s children. ChildPact is striving to ensure that our societies provide children the living conditions, opportunities and education needed to make them future contributors to our region socio-economic development.

Building on PABSEC’s Recommendation 127/2012²
Taking in account the above-mentioned Recommendation, ChildPact advocates for the creation of a BSEC–ChildPact Working Group for children. Such a working group should be designed based on previous good practices from other regions of the world (such as the children units at the Council for Baltic Sea States and the South Asian Regional Association for Regional Cooperation following conventions for cooperation in the field of child protection).

¹ This objective states: ‘ChildPact will advocate for regional cooperation at inter-governmental and civil society level, in order to identify best practices and solutions to common threats to children's well-being’. More information about ChildPact’s objectives is available at: http://www.childpact.org/about-us/what-we-do.

² Calls on the Member States to strengthen regional cooperation in child protection and build a regional trust fund for children.
The BSEC–ChildPact Working Group for children should focus on improving the child protection systems, structures and legislation needed for improving children’s lives. It should: 1. Facilitate experience exchange; 2. Pilot and implement innovative programs and scale-up successful programs; 3. Create joint research actions on regional child protection issues; 4. Create peer-review programs; 5. Develop bi- and multilateral cooperation projects.

Arguments for creating a BSEC Working Group for children

1. Child abuse equates significant economic losses

Research has shown that children who are abandoned, abused or severely neglected can face significant life risks that are costly to society, including lower earnings, poorer education achievement, higher consumption of health services through old age and greater risk of incarceration. Investments, particularly in early childhood lead to significant reductions in infant and child mortality, future criminal activity, drug use/abuse, and costs of social services. In the US, the direct and indirect costs of child maltreatment were calculated at $94 billion a year, or one percent of the country’s GDP – including $3 billion in hospitalization, $425 million on mental health treatment and $14.4 billion on child welfare costs alone.

2. Child labour reduces productivity in the long-term

Millions of children in our region are involved in child labour. Experts proved this has major negative effects on children’s access to basic education and skills development. It also reduces their productivity and marketability in long term. Child laborers tend to earn less income later in life, while their children will also work at a young age, repeating the poverty cycle.

3. Failing to invest in child health severely impacts health care budgets

Child abuse, violence and neglect has a particularly negative impact on children’s health and nutrition. Ongoing lifetime treatment of chronic diseases linked to early-stage malnutrition impacts negatively the healthcare budgets over longer periods. Healthcare expenditures linked to stunting,


---


iodine deficiency, and iron deficiency are estimated to account for roughly two percent of China’s annual GDP and three percent of India’s.9

4. School drop-out leads to weak human capital
Too many children in our region abandon school due to poverty and other factors. Disparities in educational quality are particularly problematic from an employment perspective. The widening gap between the lack of basic education and the increasing demand for workers with post-primary education and specific technical skills is a very serious issue. Too often in our region school fails to equip students with basic numeracy and literacy skills, which means they will subsequently struggle to provide the specialized knowledge demanded by the worldwide knowledge economy.10

5. Marginalised adolescents can contribute to raising security concerns
Marginalised adolescents are more likely to engage in domestic violence and risky behaviors such as illicit drug-taking, crime and gang participation11. Large populations of frustrated teenagers (‘youth bulge’) represent a growing domestic security concern: out of 119 countries examined, 40 percent reported significant increases in social unrest since 2010.12. Giving older children and youth a better chance of employment not only helps them realize their potential, but also helps to ensure that national economies receive the needed skills for continued growth.

CONCLUSION: A BSEC WORKING GROUP FOR CHILDREN NEEDS TO BE CREATED
ChildPact urges BSEC and its Members States to acknowledge the importance of regional cooperation for child protection as emphasized by PABSEC Recommendation 127/2012 and create a Working Group for children. In this endeavour ChildPact is ready to work along BSEC to identify the best ways for building such a working group, based on models that exist in other regions of the world.

Sincerely,

Mirela Oprea, PhD
ChildPact Secretary General
On behalf of ChildPact and 1290 child protection experts and supporters who signed ChildPact’s petition for a regional cooperation mechanism for child protection.13

To react to this letter please contact:
Mirela Oprea, ChildPact Secretary General,
mirela_oprea@wvi.org

13 http://www.childpact.org/sign-our-petition/