ISSUE BRIEF

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BRIDGING REGIONAL GROUPINGS: EXPLORING COMPLEMENTARITIES BETWEEN BSEC AND D-8

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The evolving geoeconomic and geopolitical landscape has intensified the search for pragmatic, regionally grounded cooperation frameworks that can complement existing global institutions. In this context, the convergence of interests between the Black Sea Economic Cooperation (BSEC) and the Developing Eight (D-8)[1] merits closer policy attention. While both organisations were established in different historical and regional contexts, their mandates increasingly intersect in areas such as trade facilitation, connectivity, energy cooperation, and sustainable development.[2] The growing overlap in geographies, particularly involving the Balkans, the Caucasus, Türkiye, and adjacent Eurasian spaces, creates opportunities for structured engagement between the two platforms.

For Pakistan, which is an active member of D-8 and seeking greater Eurasian and Black Sea outreach,[3] BSEC–D-8 complementarities offer a pathway to expand economic diplomacy, diversify partnerships, and reinforce its role as a bridge between South Asia, West Asia, and Eurasia. This Issue Brief examines the strategic rationale for BSEC–D-8 engagement, identifies areas of

1 Organization of the Black Sea Economic Cooperation, *Charter of the Organization of the Black Sea Economic Cooperation*, adopted June 5, 1998, https://www.bsec-organization.org/charter; Developing Eight, *Istanbul Declaration*, June 15, 1997, https://developing8.org/image/Otherdocument/8388836.pdf

2 United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD), *Regional Cooperation for Development: Challenges and Opportunities* (Geneva: UNCTAD, 2023). https://unctad.org/system/files/official-document/tdr2023_en.pdf

3 Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Government of Pakistan, "SIFC Economic Diplomacy," *Ministry of Foreign Affairs*, accessed January 21, 2026. https://mofa.gov.pk/sifc-economic-diplomacy/

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institutional complementarity, and outlines policy-relevant options for initiating mutually beneficial cooperation.

Why BSEC–D-8 Engagement Matters Now

The global system is undergoing a gradual shift away from rigid bloc politics toward more flexible, issue-based regionalism. Sanctions regimes, supply-chain disruptions, energy insecurity, and infrastructure bottlenecks have increased the appeal of regional organisations that prioritize economic pragmatism over ideological alignment. Both BSEC and D-8 reflect this trend.

BSEC, established in 1992,[4] brings together countries from the Black Sea region, the Balkans, and the South Caucasus, focusing on economic cooperation, trade, transport, energy, and development finance. D-8, created in 1997,[5] groups major Muslim-majority developing economies with an explicit mandate to enhance trade, industrial cooperation, and technological exchange among members. Despite different memberships and institutional histories, both organisations emphasise economic sovereignty, South–South cooperation, and resilience through diversification.

Recent diplomatic interactions involving BSEC leadership[6] have underscored the organisation's openness to partnerships beyond its immediate geographic core. At the same time, D-8 members, particularly Pakistan and Türkiye are increasingly exploring Eurasian and Black Sea-linked economic corridors. This convergence creates a timely opportunity to explore structured dialogue and selective cooperation without necessitating formal institutional mergers.

Institutional and Geographical Complementarities

One of the most compelling rationales for BSEC–D-8 engagement lies in their geographical adjacency and overlap of strategic corridors. BSEC's membership spans the Black Sea littoral states as well as Balkan and Caucasus economies that serve as gateways between Europe and Asia. D-8 members, meanwhile, are positioned across South Asia, Southeast Asia, West Asia, and North Africa, collectively representing significant demographic and market potential.

4 Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Türkiye, "The Black Sea Economic Cooperation," *Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Türkiye*, accessed January 21, 2026. https://www.mfa.gov.tr/the-black-sea-economic-cooperation.en.mfa

5 Developing-8 Organization for Economic Cooperation (D-8), "Brief History of D-8," *Developing-8*, accessed January 21, 2026. https://developing8.org/about-d-8/brief-history-of-d-8/

6 Organization of the Black Sea Economic Cooperation (BSEC), "Visit by the Secretary General of the Developing-8 Organization," *BSEC News*, published January 21, 2026. https://www.bsec-organization.org/news/10838visit-by-the-secretary-general-of-the-developing-8-organization

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Türkiye occupies a pivotal position as a member of both frameworks, providing a natural diplomatic and logistical bridge. Azerbaijan's growing connectivity role, coupled with Pakistan's expanding engagement with Central Asia and the Caucasus, further reinforces the logic of cross-regional dialogue. From a geoeconomic perspective, BSEC's emphasis on maritime trade, port infrastructure, and regional transport networks complements D-8's focus on industrial cooperation, value-added trade, and development financing.

Institutionally, both organisations operate through sectoral working groups, ministerial meetings, and specialised financial mechanisms. This structural similarity lowers the barriers to cooperation through memoranda of understanding (MoU), joint working groups, or observer-level engagements, allowing for incremental progress without institutional overstretch.

Priority Areas for Potential Cooperation

Several functional domains stand out as low-risk, high-impact areas for initial BSEC–D-8 engagement:

- **Trade Facilitation and Connectivity:** Both organisations seek to reduce non-tariff barriers and improve logistics. Joint studies on trade corridors linking South Asia to the Black Sea, via Türkiye, the Caucasus, and Central Asia could support practical policy outcomes.

- **Energy and Energy Security:** BSEC's experience in Black Sea energy transit and D-8 members' growing energy demand create scope for dialogue on energy transportation, renewables, and energy efficiency. Such engagement would be particularly relevant amid global energy market volatility.

- **SMEs and Industrial Cooperation:** D-8's emphasis on small and medium enterprises aligns well with BSEC's development agenda. Knowledge-sharing initiatives and business-to-business forums could help SMEs access new markets across both regions.

- **Food Security and Agriculture:** The Black Sea region's agricultural output and D-8 countries' food security concerns provide a complementary basis for cooperation on supply stability, agribusiness, and technology transfer.

Pakistan's Strategic Stakes

For Pakistan, BSEC–D-8 complementarities are strategically significant on multiple levels. First, they align with Pakistan's broader objective of diversifying economic partnerships beyond traditional

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regions. Engagement with BSEC-linked economies offers access to new markets, logistics hubs, and investment opportunities connected to Europe and Eurasia.

Second, Pakistan's deepening ties with Türkiye, Azerbaijan, and Central Asian states provide diplomatic capital that can be leveraged to support exploratory BSEC–D-8 engagement. Islamabad's interest in transregional connectivity, linking South Asia with West Asia, the Caucasus, and Eastern Europe, resonates with both organizations' agendas.

Third, positioning Pakistan as an agenda-setter within D-8 on cross-regional cooperation enhances its diplomatic profile and reinforces its image as a constructive, forward-looking actor within the 'Global South'. Rather than pursuing formal institutional expansion, Pakistan can advocate pragmatic, issue-based collaboration that delivers tangible economic dividends.

Policy Options and Recommendations

To operationalise BSEC–D-8 complementarities, policymakers may consider the following steps:

1. **Initiate an Issue-Based Dialogue:** Encourage informal consultations between BSEC and D-8 secretariats on shared economic priorities, beginning with trade facilitation and connectivity. As mentioned earlier, the recent meeting between the Secretary Generals of BSEC and D-8 on January 21, 2026 is an encouraging development towards this end.

2. **Promote Track-II and Think-Tank Engagement:** Support policy dialogues, joint seminars, and research collaborations involving think tanks and academic institutions from both regions to develop actionable policy ideas.

3. **Leverage Türkiye's Bridging Role:** Utilise Türkiye's membership in both organisations to facilitate diplomatic outreach and pilot initiatives.

4. **Explore Observer or Guest Participation:** Consider inviting BSEC representatives to selected D-8 meetings or vice versa on a case-by-case basis to explore cooperation without formal commitments.

5. **Align with National Development Priorities:** Ensure that any engagement advances Pakistan's economic diplomacy objectives, particularly in trade diversification, energy security, and connectivity.

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Conclusion

The convergence of economic priorities between BSEC and D-8 reflects broader trends toward flexible, interest-driven regionalism in a fragmented global order. While the two organisations differ in geography and composition, their shared emphasis on economic cooperation, connectivity, and development creates meaningful space for engagement. For Pakistan, exploring BSEC–D-8 complementarities is less about institutional expansion and more about strategic positioning, using regional platforms to enhance economic resilience, diplomatic reach, and regional integration. A calibrated, step-by-step approach grounded in policy realism can transform this emerging convergence into a source of mutual benefit.

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