

Dushanbe Communiqué for 23rd Council of Ministers (COM) Meeting

(Dushanbe, Tajikistan, 17 April, 2018)

We, the Foreign Ministers/Heads of Delegation¹ of the Economic Cooperation Organization, gathered in Dushanbe on 17 April 2018 under the chairmanship of H.E. Mr. Sirodjidin Aslov, Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Tajikistan on the occasion of 23rd Meeting of the ECO Council of Ministers,

We, therefore, while:

Reiterating our strong commitment to the objectives of the Organization as enshrined in the Treaty of Izmir, and in this context, **Highlighting** the importance of cooperation between Member States for the implementation of the core objectives of ECO as set forth under the ECO Vision 2025,

Recalling the 13th Summit Declaration (Islamabad Declaration) and the tasks given there under to the ECO Secretariat as well as the ECO Member States for achievement of the objectives of the Organization, including inter alia, the reforms of the organization as a whole,

Recognizing that trade is the engine of the national and regional growth, and continues to be a major factor in generating employment and encouraging innovation, and contributing to the well-being and welfare of our people,

Encouraging further increase in the share of intra-ECO trade and enhanced role of ECO Region in the global trade,

Emphasizing the importance of undertaking efforts aimed at trade facilitation for increasing intra-regional trade of ECO,

¹ *Turkmenistan dissociated from Dushanbe Communiqué*

Recognizing that huge growth potential exists in trade flows among ECO countries in the coming decades, and that enhanced economic cooperation among the ECO countries will be conducive to our shared interests and **Cognizant** of the benefits of cooperation in trade, its contribution to global prosperity and development,

Recognizing the different national realities, capacities and levels of development, as well as respect for various national policies and priorities of the ECO countries,

Recognizing the importance of transport connectivity in the ECO Region and emphasizing on the necessary policy and regulatory frameworks, harmonize technical and operational standards, utilizing technological know-how and best practices and encouraging projects and initiatives that practically contribute to the implementation of the ECO Vision 2025,

Reaffirming the importance of building on a more diverse and resilient energy architecture in ECO Region with a view to enhancing regional energy security and sustainability,

Recalling our commitment to promote active regional collaboration and mutual assistance in social, cultural, technical and scientific fields which should also be followed along with the core objectives of the Organization and to this end, **Placing emphasis** on the effective collaboration between the ECO Member States within the framework of ECO Specialized Agencies,

Reaffirming the importance of judicial, anti-corruption and law-enforcement forces'/bodies' cooperation and devising mechanisms and means to curb human & drug trafficking, organized and cybercrimes in the ECO Region,

Reaffirming that terrorism cannot and should not be associated with any religion, nationality, civilization or ethnic group,

Acknowledging the crucial role which can be played by the Regional Institutions established within the framework of ECO for provision of financial and commercial facilities and investment of funds within the region, and **Reiterating** the need for strengthening the capacity of these institutions,

Underscoring the tremendous attractions and capacities of the region for becoming an international tourism destination and recognizing the outstanding initiatives and programmes for promotion of ECO and Silk Road tourism potentials, and welcoming the activities of the Member States for promotion and capacity building in this area,

Emphasizing on the importance of establishment of effective cooperative relations between ECO and other International Organizations, including, *inter alia*, UN's specialized agencies, funds, programmes and regional commissions, aiming at addressing the objectives of the Organization and in this context Welcoming the recently established cooperative relationship with the World Intellectual Property Organization (WIPO), United Nations Office for South-South Cooperation (UNOSSC), and **Welcoming** the recent MoUs with other Institutions that is the Statistical, Economic and Social Research and Training Centre for Islamic Countries (SESRIC) and Economic Policy Research Foundation of Turkey (TEPAV),

Expressing our desire for a secure, prosperous and peaceful Afghanistan, and recalling the need for the development of ECO advocacy programme for Afghanistan, and **Encouraging** ECO Member States to realize their commitment regarding Afghanistan Reconstruction Fund taking into account the progress report of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan on the utilization of the Fund so far,

Appreciating the successful work done by the Drugs and Organized Crimes Coordination Unit (DOCCU) of the Secretariat for implementing its Work Programme in 2017, Stressing the continuation of the said Work Programme in the coming years within the Implementation Framework of ECO Vision 2025 in this regard,

Emphasizing the important role of cooperation in industrial, technological and scientific fields, within and out of Organization.

Enhancing the efforts for the strengthening of the cooperation in the field of Trade and Investment and supporting small and medium businesses, as well as creating favourable conditions for attracting investments between ECO Member States.

Appreciating Republic of Tajikistan for the timely hosting of High-Level International Conference on International Decade of Action "Water for Sustainable Development, 2018-2028" to be held in Dushanbe on 20-22 June 2018.

Emphasizing the importance of effective cooperation among ECO Member States for curbing and mitigating the adverse impacts of climate change through sustainable and sound practices,

Have agreed to:

1. **Mobilize** the required resources for the proper and timely implementation of the ECO Vision 2025, and in this context **Recognize** the importance of review mechanism for its effective implementation.
2. **Task** the Secretariat to review and revise the ECO Rules of Procedure with a view to removing inconsistency and filling gaps.
3. **Urge** the ECO Secretariat in close cooperation with the Secretariat of the Specialized Agencies and Regional Institutions to bring about the reform of these institutions.
4. **Give Priority** to the need for achieving an increase in the intra-ECO trade by gradual liberalisation of trade flows, harmonization of standards, dissemination of market information, enhancing trade facilitation and elimination of all such measures which restrict trade flows.
5. **Support** efforts at preparation of ECO Trade Facilitation Agreement and **Call Upon** Member States to actively participate in relevant meetings.
6. **Invite** the Member States to accelerate their procedures to finalize the text of the ECO Agreement on Mutual Administrative Assistance in Customs Matters.
7. **Cognizant** of the crucial role of financing for regional development, appreciate the ECO Bank's growing scope of activities and underlines the need to further strengthen the Bank through augmenting its resource-based and increasing its Membership.
8. **Welcome** the opening of the Astana International Financial Center, the new high-tech exchange marketplace for capital market financing, asset management, private banking and new financial technologies. Encourage member States of making use of this platform for investments.
9. **Reaffirm** our support to the accession of the remaining ECO Member States to WTO. And in this context, strongly deplore any attempts to block or restrict an ECO Member State for accession to the WTO.
10. **Reaffirm** our commitment to further strengthening of ECO multimodal transit and transport network, which gears for a sound corporate governance to ensure a mobile, interconnected, productive, efficient and affordable transport.

11. **Appreciate** the close cooperation between the ECO Secretariat and ITU resulted in materializing the mandate of ECO Ministers of ICT via assessing national policies and strategies on ICT development in the Member States and designing of “2025 Regional Strategy for Information Society Development” in line with 2025 ECO Vision aimed to promote integration and cooperation in ICT among the ECO Member Countries and focus on creating conditions for the development of a world-class information society and digital economy.
12. **Underscore** the importance of the Trans-Eurasian Information Super Highway (TASIM) project aimed at strengthening a sustainable cooperation by creation of information (internet) infrastructure for establishment of regional digital information society and bridge the digital divide across the wider region.
13. **Invite**, both, public and private sector stakeholders, to come forward with their effective investment solutions to ensure the continued improvement in the fair access to the regional transportation network of rail passenger and freight services.
14. **Recognize** the importance of the initiatives that are developed within and outside the framework of ECO which are contributing to inter-regional connectivity and cooperation, including *inter alia*, Uzbekistan-Turkmenistan-Iran and Oman Corridor, Baku-Tbilisi-Kars railway, China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), Belt and Road, Iran-Republic of Azerbaijan’s portion of the International North-South Transport Corridor (INSTC) i.e. Qazvin – Rasht–Astara (Iran)–Astara (Azerbaijan) , West-China and West-Europe Expressway, Kazakhstan-Turkmenistan-Iran (KTI) Railway, Kyrgyzstan-Tajikistan-Afghanistan-Iran (KTAI) Rail and Road Corridors, Tajikistan-Afghanistan-Turkmenistan Project, Istanbul-Tehran-Islamabad (ITI) Rail and Road Corridors, Almaty-Bandar Abbas, Istanbul-Almaty Railway Container Trains, CASA-1000, TAPI Corridor, 5 Nations Railway Corridor (China, Kyrgyz Republic, Tajikistan, Iran, Afghanistan), Lapis-Lazuli Trade and Transit Corridor, China-Kyrgyzstan-Uzbekistan Railway Corridor, Development of Chabahar Port, Kunar Dam Project, Peshawar-Kabul Express Highway, Khost-Miran Shah Railway, Chaman-Spin Boldak Railway, Mazar-i-Sharif-Herat Railway, Khaff-Herat Railway, Baku-Ceyhan Oil Pipeline, Expanded Baku-Erzurum Natural Gas Pipeline, and Iran-Azerbaijan-Russia electricity transmission line.
15. **Renew** our commitment for full implementation of the Transit Transport Framework Agreement (TTFA) to facilitate regular and commercially justified operation of transnational transport corridors in the ECO Region and modernization of border crossing points.

16. **Acknowledge** the need for implementation of major international conventions/agreements to aimed at simplifying procedures for smooth movement of people and goods across the region and beyond.
17. **Welcome** the mainstreaming of clean and sustainable energy sources, energy efficiency, and electricity trade/connectivity agendas within the regional energy cooperation in line with ECO Vision 2025 and UN 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.
18. **Call for** development of regional strategies and initiatives to accomplish the regional and universal climate change and other environmental goals.
19. **Cooperate** closely in order to develop a robust regional tourism industry and build on the vast natural endowments and cultural resources as potential contributor to the economic growth and sustainable development of the region and to strengthen affinities and link among the people of the region. And in this connection, **Task** the Secretariat to start preparing a Regional Strategy on Tourism Development within the scope of the ECO Vision 2025.
20. **Welcome** the entry into force of the Articles of Agreement on the Establishment of ECO Reinsurance Company, and **Encourage** the Parties to the Agreement to expedite its establishment and operationalization.
21. **Welcome** the successful outcome of International Specialized Exhibition EXPO-2017 and the establishment of the “Future Energy” International Centre for green technologies and investment projects. Encourage Member States of making use of this Centre.
22. **Welcome** the candidacy of Baku to the Bureau of International Exhibitions to host World Expo 2025 and wish every success to Republic of Azerbaijan as the only candidate among the ECO Member States.
23. **Task** the ECO Secretariat to develop, in collaboration with the ECO Trade and Development Bank, the Structure and Modalities of the ECO Vision Fund provided for under` ECO Vision 2025 and call on Member States to support the Fund.
24. **Reaffirm** the importance of carrying out the ECO activities in a focused manner with an effective monitoring and evaluation mechanism and prioritizing existing activities in order to enhance the effectiveness and efficiency of the Organization and requests the Secretariat to pay due consideration to this issue in the Reform Process.

25. **Recall** commitment for implementation of the ECO Trade Agreement (ECOTA) and continue efforts to establish Regional Free Trade Area as envisaged in ECO Vision 2025, taking into account commitments of some ECO Member States in other international and regional organizations, as well as their financial capabilities, requests Contracting Parties to explore necessary mechanisms and solutions for early implementation of the ECOTA; also **Call Upon** the remaining Member States to join ECOTA.
26. **Emphasize** the importance of enhanced interaction among the businessmen of the region, and **Call Upon** the Member States to support the activities of ECO-CCI, and also encourage the ECO-CCI to enhance its activities for the promotion of businesses in the Region.
27. **Emphasize** also the importance of meaningful collaboration between ECO Secretariat and its regional and specialized bodies, which is instrumental for enhanced interaction within the Region.
28. **Welcome** also the entry into force of the Agreement on the Establishment and Operation of ECO Smuggling and Customs Offences Data Bank and invite signatory states to take the required measures for implementation of the Agreement; **Urge** the Contracting Parties to accelerate their internal preparations and closely cooperate for the establishment and operation of the Data Bank, which is located in Ankara, Turkey.
29. **Welcome** the efforts on promoting the draft resolution of 73rd Session of UNGA on mid-term and comprehensive review of International Decade of Action: “Water for Sustainable Development 2018-2028”, which will become an important platform for dialogue and exchange of information and expertise, as well as an important instrument to facilitate achieving the goals and objectives of sustainable development related to the water resources.
30. **Support** the industrial, technological and scientific cooperation among the Member Countries, and in this connection emphasize the ongoing interaction on industrial property rights, ECO-RISCAM, ECO-Nano-Technology Network and ECO-ABN.
31. **Reiterate** the need for enhanced regional cooperation on combating drugs and organized crime and in this context, request Member States for early operationalization of envisaged cooperative arrangements, such as ECOPOL, ECO Regional Center for Cooperation on Anti-Corruption and Regional/Legal Assistance mechanism; request Member States to support the Secretary General to strengthen capacities and resources of ECO DOCCU.

32. **Express** our full support for implementation of the New ECO Advocacy Programme for Afghanistan (EAPA).
33. **Recognizing** the importance of the role which can be played by the ECO Member State, individually or collectively, in implementation of initiatives developed outside of the framework of ECO aimed at fostering the economic development of Afghanistan, including, under –RECCA, Heart of Asia-Istanbul Process (HoA-IP).
34. **Emphasize** the pivotal role of energy sector in the sustainable development of ECO Member States and the efforts to explore opportunities for the improvement of need in unfolding regional energy cooperation opportunities through the ongoing initiatives of establishment of ECO Regional Electricity Market and ECO Clean Energy Center as envisaged in ECO Vision 2025.
35. **Welcome** the High Level International Conference on Afghanistan Tashkent Conference: Peace Process, Security Cooperation and Regional Connectivity held on March 27, 2018 in Tashkent which has become an important milestone in stabilization of Afghanistan, creation of environment for its sustainable development, enhancement the wellbeing of the Afghan people and its involvement in creative processes in Afghanistan, region and the world as a whole.
36. **Welcome** the initiative on establishment of a new format of cooperation "Central Asia + Afghanistan" (C5+ A) aimed at greater interaction between the countries of Central Asia and Afghanistan. We note that the work within this format will promote successful integration of Afghanistan into the system of trade, economic, and infrastructural communications with the Central Asian states, effective implementation of specific projects and programs of regional scope.
37. **Note** the importance of the project on construction of the Surhan-Puli-Khumri power transmission line for the social and economic development of Afghanistan and welcome the efforts of Uzbekistan on its implementation.
38. **Support** the initiatives and programmes of the Secretariat and Member States to revive Silk road tourism potential and in this context encourage the continuation of the ECO Silk Road Food Festival in Zanjan, Islamic Republic of Iran as a success story in tourism sector.
39. **Appreciate** the efforts of the Kyrgyz Republic to promote the World Nomad Games, successfully held in 2014 and 2016, which contribute to

the development of ethno-historical sports, inter-civilization and intercultural dialogue, ECO member states express their readiness to actively participate in the 3rd World Nomads Games , which will be held on September 2-8, 2018 in Kyrgyzstan.

40. **Express** concern about the existing unresolved conflicts in the ECO Region, including Armenia-Azerbaijan conflict, which hinder the economic growth and realization of the full economic potential of the Region and impede the development of economic cooperation on regional as well as broader level, and **Stress** the importance of making increased efforts for the earliest resolution of these conflicts based on the norms and principles of international law, in particular the principles of respect to sovereignty and territorial integrity.
41. **Acknowledge** the internationally agreed norms and principles, concerning sovereignty and **Express** concern over the attempts by certain quarters to threaten democracy, discriminatory immigration policies by some states and use of unilateral economic sanctions and coercions by some states. Further **Acknowledge** the need for supporting measures to immediately address the threats to democratic governments, including *coup d'états* aimed at overthrowing the democratically elected governments and constitutional orders of the Member Countries and the foreign occupation of the territories of the Member States, including economic strangulation, which undermine the role of the legitimate democratic governments in pursuing their socio-economic development and programmes.
42. **Welcome** the initiative of the Kyrgyz Republic to update UN General Assembly resolution on the role of the international community in the prevention of radiation threats in Central Asia, which will be considered during the 73rd session of the UN General Assembly in 2018 in order to solve the problems of ensuring environmental safety and sustainable development of the region.
43. **Appreciate** the efforts of the outgoing ECO Secretary General, H.E. Mr. Halil Ibrahim Akca, under whose tenure the Organization had enhanced its overall regional agenda of economic cooperation among the ECO Member States.

We also Express our profound thanks to H.E. Mr. Emomali Rahmon, President of the Republic of Tajikistan, H.E. Mr. Sirodjidin Aslov, Foreign Minister for their support and contribution to the 23rd Meeting of the ECO Council of Ministers, also **Extend** our gratitude to the Government and People of the Republic of Tajikistan for the warm hospitality and the excellent arrangement made for the Meeting of the ECO Council of Ministers.
