

The 8th Summit
Statement of the ECO Secretary General
(*Dushanbe, 14 September, 2004*)

Annex-VII

By H.E. Askhat Orazbay
ECO Secretary General

*Honourable President of the Republic of Tajikistan,
Honourable Heads of State/Government/Delegations,
Distinguished Delegates,
Representatives of the International Organizations,
Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,*

It is a great privilege for me to address the Honourable Presidents/Heads of Delegation of the ECO Member States on the occasion of the 8th ECO Summit being held in the garden city Dushanbe today.

I would like to join others in congratulating Your Excellency on your election as the Chairman of the 8th ECO Summit. I am confident that ECO would continue to prosper under your able leadership.

It is also a pleasant duty for me to express my heartfelt thanks to the Government of the Republic of Tajikistan for the excellent arrangements made for this meeting and the warm hospitality extended to all delegations.

My sincere thanks also go to the former Chairman, President of the Republic of Turkey, H.E. Mr. Ahmet Necdet Sezer, for providing vision and guidance to us on matters that are so crucial for the realization of lofty goals of ECO.

I would also like to appreciate the participation of UN agencies and other international bodies in this august gathering. The reports on their cooperation with the Economic Cooperation Organization and their activities in the region have been circulated among the participating dignitaries.

Mr. Chairman,

I would be failing in my duty if I don't appreciate the efforts of the honourable Foreign Ministers for the efforts that they have made in the finalization and adoption of the report of the 14th Council of Ministers' meeting held two days ago here in Dushanbe. The report gives a new direction to the future ECO activities as well as a credible mechanism for the early implementation of the important decisions made in various ECO meetings.

The respectful Foreign Ministers during their deliberations approved and adopted important documents such as the report of the Secretary General, reports of the Council of Permanent Representatives and sectoral Ministerial meetings. They also reviewed the report of the Eminent Persons Group that was established on the recommendations of the 13th COM. They also deliberated on matters like ECO's participation in the reconstruction of Afghanistan; ECO's activities over the last fifteen months and administrative issues like the formal approval of ECO's budget for the 2004 and the appointment of the ECO Audit Board etc.

Another important document they reviewed and prepared for the consideration of the Presidents and Heads of delegation was the Dushanbe Declaration. Once adopted, it would provide new direction to the future course of our organization. It will also serve as a valuable document giving important policy guidelines and will also reflect reiteration of our commitment for the cherished goals of ECO.

Mr. Chairman,

In the past two years, we have been able to hold Ministerial meetings in areas such as Trade, Industry, Finance/Economy and Transport & Communications. In the next few weeks we will hold a Ministerial Meeting on Environment in Turkey. In addition to the above meetings, ministerial meetings on Energy, Commerce/Foreign

Trade, Agriculture, Information Technology and Finance & Economy are also on the cards.

Unfortunately, our intra-regional trade is not commensurate with our true potential. At present level, intra-regional trade among the ECO Member States is around US\$ 11 billion (2002), which is approximately 5.6 per cent of their total foreign trade. We must take measures to raise our trade to a more respectable level. A significant step to enhance the intra-regional trade was the signing of ECO Trade Agreement (ECOTA) in Islamabad on 17 July 2003.

This agreement calls for the progressive elimination of non-tariff barriers and rationalization of tariff structure. So far, only one Member State (Tajikistan) has ratified the Agreement. May I, therefore, take this opportunity to request the signatory Member States to accelerate the process of ratification of ECOTA as early as possible. Those Member States that have not yet signed the agreement, may also consider signing the same at the earliest.

Mr. Chairman,

We cannot visualize a significant improvement in the intra-regional trade as well our share in the global trade unless we develop and put in place efficient means of transport and communications and also facilitate transit transport within the region and beyond. It is, therefore, important that the Member States may give their wholehearted support to the projects concerning the construction of missing roads and railway links; introduction of regular container and passenger trains on the trans-Asian main line route and the early implementation of the Transit Transport Framework Agreement.

ECO has used its growing links with UN bodies and regional organizations as well as financial institutions to promote development projects in the region. Relevant agencies continue to play an active role in sharing substantive responsibilities in various ECO projects and programmes. IDB, UNDP, UNESCAP, UNFPA, UNCTAD, FAO and ITC deserve particular mention in this connection.

In 2003, ECO signed Memoranda of Understanding with the World Customs Organization (WCO), UN Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE) and Colombo Plan. Recently, a Memorandum of Understanding was signed between UN Environment Programme and ECO for strengthening Environmental Management in the ECO region.

The presence of the representatives of a number of these organizations in this august gathering today bears testimony to this growing relationship.

In accordance with the ECO Plan of Action on Drug Control, a Drug Control Coordination Unit (DCCU) was established at the ECO Secretariat in order to enhance drug control regional cooperation and coordination among the ECO Member States. The 2nd phase of the project is coming to an end shortly. It is imperative that the activities of the DCCU may continue after the completion of the Project, which is instrumental in synchronizing most of the anti-narcotics efforts in the region. The Second meeting of the National Focal Points of DCCU was held in Dushanbe on 27 August 2004. The meeting *inter alia* urged the ECO to request the European Union (EU) and the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) to continue to extend their financial and technical support the DCCU Project and start its 3rd phase.

Within the framework of the ECO Plan of Action for ECO's participation in the reconstruction of Afghanistan, feasibility studies for priority projects of Afghanistan have been financed from the ECO Feasibility Fund. ECO Special Fund for reconstruction of Afghanistan will also become operational soon. The modalities for the utilization of this fund were approved by the 14th COM two days ago.

The Secretariat is focusing on the implementation of the Plan of Action for Energy/Petroleum Cooperation in the ECO region. In this connection, several meetings, training, workshops etc. have been held from time to time. It is hoped that the forthcoming 2nd ECO Ministerial meeting on Energy/Petroleum, to be held in Tehran, will also consider progress on the implementation of this Plan of Action.

Excellencies,

Allow me to thank you for the support that I received from you today and from the Honourable Ministers

during the 14th COM and on other occasions since my appointment as the Secretary General of ECO. I would like to reiterate that it is a singular honour for me to participate as the Secretary General in the 8th ECO Summit. I will do my utmost, with the support of the ECO staff, to give a new momentum to the activities of the Organization.

Mr. Chairman,

Before I conclude, let me once again thank the Government of the Republic of Tajikistan for hosting the 14th Council of Ministers and 8th Summit meetings in Dushanbe and the Member States for their participation and valuable contributions to the deliberations of the meetings.

Thank you.

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