

ECO Secretariat
Tehran

Summary Record

The 18th Informal Meeting of the ECO Council of Ministers (COM)
(27th September, 2011-New York)

1. In keeping with the tradition, the Council of Ministers (COM) of the Economic Cooperation Organization (ECO) held their 18th Informal Meeting in New York on 27th Sep, 2011 on the eve of the 66th Session of the United Nations General Assembly. The Informal Meeting was chaired by H.E. Dr. Ahmet Davutoglu, the Foreign Minister of the Republic of Turkey as the current Chairman of the ECO COM. It was attended by the Foreign Ministers/Representatives of Afghanistan, Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Iran, Kyrgyz Republic, Pakistan, Tajikistan and Turkey. H.E. Mr. M. Yahya Maroofi, the ECO Secretary-General also participated in the Meeting. A list of participants is placed at **Annex-I**.

Agenda-item No. 1

Opening Remarks/Statement by the Chairman of the COM

2. In his opening remarks, H.E. Dr. Ahmet Davutoglu, welcomed the Foreign Ministers/Representatives of the Member States and stated that the Informal COM Meeting provided an excellent opportunity to take-stock of developments in ECO cooperation and also to provide impetus to accelerate progress on various initiatives. The opening remarks were followed by a brief statement in which the Turkish Foreign Minister, inter alia, laid emphasis on the need to enhance efficiency, effectiveness and visibility of ECO and to expedite implementation of framework agreements particularly ECOTA to enhance ECO's share in regional and global trade.

3. The Chairman, while referring to the global challenges related to economic and financial crisis, energy and food security, environment and climate change, underscored the significance of enhancing cooperation at regional and global levels to effectively address these issues. He added that ECO was an excellent multinational economic platform in the region with the potential to contribute to region's economic stability and prosperity.

4. With respect to the Eminent Persons Group (EPG), the Minister expressed the hope that recommendations of the EPG would help ECO accelerate realization of the goals enshrined in ECO Vision 2015. In order to facilitate work of the EPG, he announced Turkey's willingness to contribute US\$ 200,000/- and expressed the hope that other Member States would consider making similar contributions for

the smooth conduct of the EPG's work. The Minister also invited the concerned Member States to nominate their respective eminent persons and encouraged all the Member States to actively participate in the EPG process.

5. Referring to the 11th ASEAN-ECO Joint Ministerial Meeting held on 24 Sep, 2011, the Foreign Minister expressed his appreciation over the outcome of the Meeting and expressed the hope that follow-up on the decisions of the Joint Meeting would pave the way for furthering long-term strategic cooperation between ECO and ASEAN and would bring the two regions closer to each other. He added that cooperation with ASEAN would also contribute to ECO's visibility in the international arena.

6. The Chairman underlined the need to further enhance solidarity among ECO family to boost intra-regional cooperation. He stated that political will and active support by the Member States would help ECO realize its full potential as a regional Organization. Copy of the Statement is placed at **Annex-II**.

Agenda-item No. 2

Adoption of the Agenda

7. The Meeting unanimously endorsed the following Agenda as finalized by the 169th Meeting of the ECO Council of Permanent Representatives in Tehran:

- i) Opening Remarks/Statement by the Chairman of the COM
- ii) Adoption of the Agenda
- iii) Remarks/Statement by the ECO Secretary General
- iv) Exchange of views on ECO's recent activities/status of implementation of the decisions of the 11th ECO Summit /19th COM Meeting.
- v) Endorsement of recommendations of the ECO Contact Group in New York for follow-up/ implementation of the UNGA Resolution A/RES/65/129 on UN-ECO Cooperation
- vi) Any other business
- vii) Adoption of draft Press Release/Communiqué
- viii) Vote of Thanks
- ix) Family Photo

Agenda-item No.3

Remarks/Statement by the ECO Secretary General

8. Under this Agenda-item, the Secretary General presented an interim review of the status of implementation of the decisions taken at the 11th ECO Summit and the 19th COM in Dec, 2010 in Istanbul. He also briefed the Meeting on ECO's current programmes/projects and activities in various sectors of cooperation. The

Secretary-General also apprised the Ministers about the work of the Eminent Persons Group. In his concluding remarks, the Secretary-General requested the Member States to expedite signing/ratification and implementation of ECO Agreements particularly, ECOTA, TTFA, the Revised Protocol to the Agreement on Simplification of Visa Procedures for Businessmen and Transit Drivers, Customs cooperation, Agreement on Promotion and Protection of Investment, Articles of ECO Trade & Development Bank and the Charters of the ECO Specialized Agencies/Regional Institutions. A copy of the Statement is placed at **Annex-III**.

Agenda-item No. 4

Exchange of views on ECO's recent activities/status of implementation of the decisions of the 11th ECO Summit /19th COM

9. The Ministers/Representatives exchanged views on the progress made by ECO in the recent months. The gist of the remarks made by the Foreign Ministers/Representatives is given below:-

10. The Foreign Minister of Pakistan, in her brief remarks, highlighted the significance of ECO to advance regional cooperation among the ECO family. She renewed Pakistan's firm commitment to promoting regional integration within the framework of ECO. With respect to ECO initiatives, the Minister stressed the need to expedite full implementation of trade liberalization under ECOTA to give meaningful boost to intra-regional trade in the region.

11. The Foreign Minister of Iran appreciated the comprehensive report presented by the Secretary General. Sharing his views, the Minister stated that ECO must give special attention to i) ensuring feasibility of and implementation of its decisions both at the regional and national levels, ii) promoting visibility of its achievements and advantages especially in the transport and transit areas both within and outside the region and iii) enhancing solidarity among the Member States. The Minister further laid emphasis on the need for ECO to enhance its effectiveness in dealing with current and emerging challenges of regional and global dimension to socioeconomic development. The Minister was of the view that ECO should pursue project-oriented approach to fully realize its over-reaching goals of promoting socio-economic development and enhancing quality of life of the people of the region. While appreciating activation of ECO Contact Groups, the Foreign Minister expressed the confidence that implementation of the recommendations of the Contact Group Meeting held in New York on 9 Sep, 11 would result in meaningful improvement of ECO relations with the UN System. With respect to the 11th ASEAN-ECO Joint Meeting, the Iranian Foreign Minister welcomed the outcome/decisions of the Joint Session.

12. The Foreign Minister of Afghanistan, in his remarks, stressed the need to give special focus to speed-up implementation of various agreements and initiatives in the trade and transport sectors including ECOTA and TTFA. He appreciated the successful run of ECO Silk Road Truck Caravan as well as the regular run of container train on Islamabad-Tehran-Istanbul route and stressed the need to expedite implementation of various projects in the transport and other sectors. The Foreign Minister also acknowledged the contributions made by ECO out of its Afghan Reconstruction Fund for undertaking small-scale projects in Afghanistan.

13. The Foreign Minister of Azerbaijan appreciated Turkish leadership as Chairman of the ECO Summit/COM. The Minister stated that cooperation in the areas of trade, transport, finance, and health constituted an essential element for development in the region. He appreciated the progress made in the transport sector and stated that building of transport infrastructure including highways in the region would contribute to increasing trade as well as enhancing people-to-people contacts among the Member States. While referring to the decisions of the 11th ASEAN-ECO Joint Ministerial Meeting, he lauded the initiative to activate ministerial-level consultative process with ASEAN; renewed Azerbaijan's offer to host Joint Ministerial Meeting between ECO and ASEAN together with a Senior Officials Meeting and a ASEAN – ECO Business Forum in Baku, preferably back to back with ECO Summit/COM Meeting in 2012. In order to organize productive meetings/sessions between the two Organizations, he proposed that the matter be discussed further between the two Secretariats to work out necessary details.

14. The Foreign Minister of Turkey while sharing his vision of promoting inter-regional/sub-regional cooperation within Asia was of the view that in the next 20 years, Asia would assume greater prominence in global affairs/trade. He added that in order for ECO to benefit from such a bright prospect in future, efforts were required at this stage to cultivate cooperation with other sub-regional organizations in particular ASEAN and with countries like China and Russia in Asia. He further expressed that an approach of multilateralism was necessary for ECO to maintain its centrality and effectiveness as a regional grouping and also to ensure that the status of ECO in Asia was not reduced to that of Eastern Europe in the Europe Union. ECO must review its vision from time to time and set forth long-term strategic priorities in various sectors of cooperation. He proposed that a brain storming session may be organized on the occasion of 12th ECO Summit/20th COM in Baku in 2012 to discuss Turkey's vision for enhancing inter-regional/sub-regional cooperation in Asia and to determine ECO's strategic priorities with respect to cooperation with other sub-regional organizations and important countries in future.

15. The Deputy Minister of the Kyrgyz Republic appreciated the comprehensive report of the ECO Secretary-General and stressed the need to accelerate efforts for implementation of the decisions pertaining to various sectors. The Deputy Minister laid emphasis on promoting cooperation with international financial institutions and enhancing private sector development.

16. The Representative of Kazakhstan at the outset appreciated Turkish leadership for their active role as current Chairman of the ECO Summit and COM. As regards ECO' performance, she stated that ECO was an important factor in promoting regional integration and that it has made considerable progress in the past. The Representative was of the view that in future, ECO must focus more on practical implementation of projects in various sectors particularly trade and investment, transport, energy and development of new – technologies. While referring to transport-related projects of ECO, she stressed the importance of TTFA. She also laid emphasis on the need to focus on enhancing cooperation on such issue as food security and scientific, cultural and educational fields as well. The Representative also informed about Kazakhstan's "Green bridge initiative/programme (2011-2020)" aimed at promoting green-economy and sustainable development and invited ECO to become part of the programme. While referring to ECO's cooperation with other regional/international organization, she stated that ECO Plan of Action for enhancing external relations offered a comprehensive framework to promote ECO's cooperation with other regional and international organizations. She also stressed the need to activate mechanism of granting observer status to relevant partners of ECO. Commenting on activation of ASEAN-ECO cooperation, the Kazakh Representative termed the 11th ASEAN-ECO Joint Ministerial Meeting a significant step forward to pursue fruitful cooperation between the two Organizations. The Kazakh Representative also sought support of ECO and the Member States for Kazakhstan's bid to host Expo 2017.

17. The Representative of Tajikistan thanked the Secretary-General for the comprehensive briefing. While referring to Tajikistan's active participation in various ECO initiatives, he shared that the feasibility study on Tajik-segment of the ECO project on construction of railway-line on Tajikistan-Kyrgyzstan-Afghanistan-Iran route connecting China to Europe was successfully completed with the financial support by Iran. With respect to ECOTA, he stated that Tajikistan was a contracting party to the Agreement and that measures were being taken at the national level to ratify the Annexes of ECOTA as well. While renewing support for ECOTA, the Tajik Representative expressed the hope that the Contracting Parties would soon resolve all the pending issues pertaining to full implementation of the Agreement. While referring to the EPG process, he opined that in order to enhance efficiency of ECO and to equip it for future challenges, efforts were required to bring necessary reforms in the Organization.

18. Copies of the Statements made available to the Secretariat are placed at **Annex IV**.

19. Following the exchange of views, the Meeting reached the following conclusions /decisions:

- i) Took note of the developments in ECO during the current year, across the spectrum of fields of cooperation and expressed appreciation for the progress made particularly in the areas of transport, narcotics control and external relations.
- ii) Commended the efforts made by the Secretariat in promoting ECO' ties with other regional and international organizations; called on the Secretary-General to sustain the ongoing efforts for further strengthening meaningful cooperation in line with the directives of the ECO decision-making bodies.
- iii) Expressed satisfaction over the activation of contacts between ECO and ASEAN; welcomed/endorsed the deliberations/decisions between the two Organizations at the 11th ASEAN-ECO Joint Ministerial Meeting held on 24 Sep, 2011 and expressed the hope that follow-up of the decisions would pave the way for forging ahead strategic partnership between ECO and ASEAN. The Meeting further directed the Secretary-General to take early steps to follow-up on the decisions of the Joint Ministerial Meeting in consultation/coordination with the ASEAN Secretariat.
- iv) Welcomed the offer made by Azerbaijan to host ASEAN-ECO Joint Ministerial Meeting, a senior officials meeting and a Joint Business Forum in Baku in 2012 on the occasion of the 12th ECO Summit/20th ECO COM Meeting. The Meeting tasked the Secretariat to consult the issue with ASEAN Secretariat to work out/coordinate necessary details.
- v) Expressed satisfaction over the successful launch of the 3rd ECO Eminent Persons Group and further expressed their confidence that recommendations of the Eminent Persons to be submitted to the 20th COM Meeting in Baku would help enhance dynamism, efficiency and visibility of ECO. The Council also appreciated Turkey's willingness to contribute US \$ 200,000/- to facilitate work of the EPG.
- vi) Welcomed Kazakhstan's bid to host the International Exhibition EXPO-2017 as well as Turkey's bid for EXPO-2020.
- vii) Underscored the need for sustained and active follow-up on all the decisions of the 11th ECO Summit and the 19th ECO COM Meeting to accelerate progress in different sectors of ECO cooperation.
- viii) Renewed their abiding commitment to fostering regional economic integration among the ECO member States in keeping with the spirit of the Treaty of Izmir and in this regard resolved to play an active role in realization of the aims and objectives of the ECO.

Agenda-item No. 5

Endorsement of recommendations of the ECO Contact Group in New York for follow-up/ implementation of the UNGA Resolution A/RES/65/129 on UN-ECO Cooperation

20. The Ministers appreciated the recommendations made by the ECO Contact Group in New York in its Meeting of 9 Sep, 2011 to enhance cooperation with the UN system. The Council endorsed the following set of recommendations and expressed the hope that their implementation would further consolidate existing ties between ECO and the UN system including through efficient implementation of the UNGA biennial Resolution on UN-ECO cooperation:

- i) The Contact Group reaffirmed that it is central to enhance cooperation with the United Nations and that further steps need to be taken in order to implement specific projects in the ECO region in collaboration with the specialized agencies, funds and programs of the UN. The Group agreed that such collaboration should be based on practical cooperation between ECO and the United Nations.
- ii) In this context, the Group further agreed that a concept paper would be prepared by an expert group in New York after seeking input from the ECO Secretariat. The paper will lay down the principles, include a short stock-taking about the existing cooperation with the UN and identify key projects of significant importance to the Region, which require technical and financial assistance of UNDP, UNFPA and UNICEF in particular. The concept paper would also suggest a mechanism to ensure effective implementation of the UN General Assembly biennial Resolution on UN-ECO cooperation.
- iii) Following the ECO Informal Council of Ministers Meeting scheduled on September 27, 2011, the ECO Contact Group in New York will discuss and finalize the concept paper. It should be clear about what the ECO Member States expect from the UN.
- iv) The paper will be sent to the Secretary General of the United Nations as well as the Heads of the relevant UN agencies attached to letters pointing out merits and implications of a fruitful cooperation between ECO and the UN, which may include concluding Memorandum of Understanding between ECO and the relevant UN agencies.

- v) Meanwhile, the communication and interaction with the General Assembly and ECOSOC will be maintained and improved so as to give more visibility to the ECO at the UN.

21. The Council further directed the Contact Group in New York to finalize at the earliest the proposed concept paper in consultation with the ECO Secretariat. It also laid emphasis on the need for the Contact Group to play an active role in promoting interest of ECO at the United Nations in line with the revised Terms of Reference as approved at the 19th COM Meeting.

Agenda-item No.6

Any other business

22. The Meeting did not discuss any other issues under this item of the Agenda.

Agenda-item No. 7

Adoption of the draft Press Release/Communiqué

23. The Informal COM Meeting deliberated the draft Press Release/Communiqué as proposed by the Secretariat. The final version of the Press Release as approved by the Ministers is placed at **Annex-V**. The Meeting directed the Permanent Mission of the Republic of Turkey to the UN to issue it to the media after the close of the Meeting.

Agenda-item No. 8

Vote of Thanks

24. The Chairman thanked the Foreign Ministers/Representatives for their participation in the Meeting as well as for making valuable comments/suggestions during the deliberations. The Ministers also expressed their gratitude to the Chair for steering the deliberations in a smooth and productive manner. The Meeting also expressed its appreciation to the ECO Secretariat and the Permanent Mission of Turkey to the United Nations for their contributions towards success of the Informal Session.

Agenda-item No. 9

Family Photo

25. A family-Photo was taken at the close of the Meeting.
