



**31<sup>st</sup> Meeting of  
the ECO Regional Planning Council (RPC)**

**Report**

**12-21 January, 2021**

The 31<sup>st</sup> Meeting of the ECO Regional Planning Council (RPC) was held virtually from January 12-21, 2021. The relevant sectoral committees meetings were held to discuss and consider their specific areas for making appropriate recommendations to the 31<sup>st</sup> Meeting of RPC.

2. The ECO Member States' delegations, including the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan, Republic of Azerbaijan, the Islamic Republic of Iran, Republic of Kazakhstan, the Islamic Republic of Pakistan, Republic of Tajikistan, Republic of Turkey and Republic of Uzbekistan participated in the meetings. The Representatives of the Turkish Cypriot State and the Turkic Council attended the Meeting in the capacity of Observer. The concerned staff of the Secretariat headed by the ECO Secretary General, H.E. Dr. Hadi Soleimanpour, also participated in the event. The Representatives of ECO Specialized Agencies, Regional Institutions and Affiliated Bodies also took part in the Meeting. The list of participants is annexed as Annexure-I.

### Plenary Session

#### **Agenda Item No.1**

##### Opening of the meeting

3. ECO Secretary General, H.E. Dr. Hadi Soleimanpour while welcoming the participants highlighted that this important ECO event convened annually to review the past activities of the organization, as well as consider and evolve some fresh programs and projects to be executed from ECO's platform for continuing the developmental process in our region. He underscored that the COVID crunch, like most parts of the world, has not spared our region, hampering regular developmental activities which were perceived to be made in consideration of the ECO Work Program and Calendar of Events for 2020 endorsed by the 30th Meeting of RPC.

4. The Secretary General further informed that one of the organization's experiences in the time of crisis was resorting to the virtual modes of working which proved to be efficient, cost-effective and fast-track. In the given context he underlined that the Secretariat conducted several ECO meetings virtually in the pursuit of organization's goals as per ECO Vision 2025 that included ministerial and High Level Working Group meetings. Holding the 31<sup>st</sup> meeting of RPC online is a continuation of such virtual approach which has been globally adopted in the aftermath of the pandemic, he added.

5. The Secretary General precisely conveyed that some important activities were made during 2020 in the specific sectors which include, trade and investment, transit transport, energy, health, agriculture, industry and tourism. While mentioning that the 24<sup>th</sup> COM meeting authorized the Secretary General to hire specialist/consultant for 10 small sized bankable projects annually, utilizing US\$ 10,000/- for each project from the General Reserve Fund, he informed that around

eight small size projects were implemented during 2020. He also requested the Council to support the Secretariat for expanding the scope and number of small sized projects to feasibility study projects by authorizing the Secretary General to implement 10 more projects annually utilizing US\$ 10000/- for each from GRF to make the organization more project-oriented. He also pointed out the importance of having meeting of mid-term RPC virtually to review the progress made in the first half of each calendar year as discussed and approved by 30<sup>th</sup> RPC meeting. He suggested the elaboration on these issues under any other business. A copy of his detailed statement is placed at Annexure-II.

6. Mr. İbrahim ŞENEL, President of Strategy and Budget Office of the Republic of Turkey expressed his pleasure to join the ECO delegates in the 31<sup>st</sup> Meeting of RPC. While extending gratitude for making arrangements to organize the meeting virtually, he appreciated the excellent preparation made by the ECO Secretariat in this regard. He underscored the challenges posed by COVID-19 in our regional cooperation. In order to better cope with such challenges, he underlined to take urgent measures for enhancing intra-regional trade as well as further cooperation in agricultural sector. He further conveyed that the Republic of Turkey attaches immense importance to expand and deepen the all-around relations with the member countries as well as strengthen ECO's activities.

7. Mr. İbrahim ŞENEL while highlighting the significance of ECO cooperation in various areas underlined the urgent need for focusing on the main and most needed fields of cooperation in which the Member States express interest, for achieving fruitful results. He added that many diverse issues and subjects in the agenda slow down the performance of the Organization. He also highlighted that temporary suspension of the agenda items encountering continuous setbacks and clear lack of interest from the Member States may be considered for effective utilization of the human capital and limited budget of the Organization.

8. In view of the above, Mr. ŞENEL recommended the Secretariat to work out a modality for taking off, from the agenda of the Organization, the unattended meetings and cooperation areas which do not induce required interest from the Member States. He further noted that any proposal on new programmes or projects from the Member States need to be accompanied by a preliminary study that includes the proposed project's cost-benefit analysis with its potential contribution to regional cooperation. This modality may contribute to better evaluation of the feasibility of the new proposals for the required decision. A copy of his statement is placed at Annexure-II

## **Agenda Item No. 2**

### Election of the Chairman

9. As per ECO's rules and procedures, Mr. Fatih ÜNLÜ, Director General of the Strategy and Budget of the Presidency of the Republic of Turkey was elected to chair the 31<sup>st</sup> Meeting of RPC.

10. Mr. Fatih ÜNLÜ, expressing gratitude for the confidence bestowed upon him by the participating Member States, appreciated the ECO Secretariat for excellent preparation of this virtual meeting of RPC. He reiterated the importance that the Republic of Turkey attaches for expanded and deepened relations amongst the member countries in the larger interest of the region. He also highlighted the importance of cooperation and acting in unison for attaining synergies and better coping with the emerging regional and global challenges.

### **Agenda Item No.3**

#### Adoption of the Agenda

11. The Council adopted the agenda of 31st Meeting of the RPC along with new agenda item proposed by the Republic of Turkey.

### **Agenda Item No. 4**

#### Statements by the Heads of Delegation on the implementation of the decisions of the 30th RPC

12. The Heads of delegations of the ECO Member States delivered their statements in alphabetical order outlining their countries' policies and views on the programmes and activities of the Organization. They also highlighted the progress made on the implementation of the decisions taken during the 30<sup>th</sup> Meeting of the RPC. Copies of their statements are placed at Annexure-II.

13. The Heads of delegations of the Turkish Cypriot State and the Turkic Council also made their Statements as observers. Copies of their statements are placed at Annexure-II.

14. The Heads of delegations of the ECO Specialized Agencies, Regional Institutions and Affiliated Bodies presented their statements/reports highlighting their activities and progress made since last RPC's meeting. Copies of their statements are attached at Annexure-II.

### **Agenda Item No.5**

#### Presentation under the theme "Economic problems caused by COVID-19 in ECO Member States and the world, way of solutions and Regional Cooperation possibilities thereof "

15. Prof. Dr. Semih TÜMEN from TED University, Republic of Turkey made a presentation under the theme "Economic problems caused by COVID-19 in ECO Member States and the world, way of solutions and Regional Cooperation possibilities thereof ". The Council appreciated the presentation and its substance. Copy of his presentation is attached as Annexure-III.

16. The Council, while strongly supporting the implementation of ECO Guidelines on Cross Border Facilitation Measures under the Conditions of COVID-

19 approved by Transport Ministerial Meeting 2020, acknowledged the importance of the Guidelines for smooth passage of essentially required goods in the region and requested the Member States to report the latest situation of implementation to the Secretariat.

17. The Council also noted that the finalization of a declaration on health by ECO High Level Expert Group was quite instrumental especially in consideration of the ongoing COVID crunch and requested the Member States to fully implement it for enhancement of regional health cooperation in the ECO.

18. The Council also requested the Secretariat to follow up the formalities for taking required action for expediting the implementation of the declaration on health and for securing approval of the relevant Ministerial meeting as well as the ECO COM.

### **Agenda Item No. 6**

#### Report on the progress of implementation of the ECO approved programmes/projects and consideration of proposals for new programmes and projects for the year 2021

19. The following delegates from the Member States chaired the meetings of the Sectoral Committees:

i.	Trade & Investment	<b>Mrs. Maria Kazi,</b> Joint Secretary, Ministry of Commerce, Islamic Republic of Pakistan
ii.	Transport and Communications	<b>Mr. Nematzoda Farrukh,</b> Head of Ground Transportation, Ministry of Transport, Republic of Tajikistan
iii.	Energy, Minerals and Environment	<b>Dr. Iman Rahmati,</b> Manager of Economics Studies & Development Company, Ministry of Energy, Islamic Republic of Iran
iv.	Agriculture & Industry	<b>Dr. Ali Kiani Rad,</b> Head of Agricultural Planning, Economic and Rural Development Research Institute, Ministry of Agriculture, Islamic Republic of Iran
v.	Tourism	<b>Mr. Javid Abdullayev,</b> Head of Division for Work with International Organizations of the State Tourism Agency , Republic of Azerbaijan
vi.	Human Resources & Sustainable Development	<b>Mr. Erhan Sirt,</b> Head of Multilateral Development Cooperation Department, Presidency of Strategy and Budget Republic of Turkey
vii.	Judicial and Parliamentary Coordination and EAPA	<b>Mr. Mansour Agha Mohammadi,</b> Director General, International Relations of the General Inspection Organization, Islamic Republic of Iran
viii.	ECO Regional Institutions/ Specialized Agencies/ Affiliated Bodies International Relations	<b>Mr. Nihat Akbalik,</b> Expert, Presidency of Strategy and Budget, Republic of Turkey
ix.	Economic Research and Statistics	<b>Mr. Gokten Damar,</b> Senior Expert, Presidency of Strategy and Budget, Republic of Turkey

## **Agenda Item No. 7**

### Endorsement of the draft outcomes

#### Annual Work Programme- 2021

20. Reviewing all Sectoral Work Programmes developed by the Sectoral Committees during their Meetings, the Council endorsed the ECO Work Programme-2021 to be considered/approved by the COM. The same is placed at Annexure-IV of this Report.

#### Calendar of Events- 2021

21. Annual ECO Calendar of Events for 2021 finalized by the Sectoral Committees Meetings was also reviewed and endorsed by the Council for final consideration of approval by the COM, which is placed at Annexure-V of this Report.

## **Agenda Item No. 8**

### Any other business

22. The Council, while considering and acknowledging the importance of the proposals of Secretary General regarding the mid-term virtual RPC meeting and inclusion of ten more feasibility study projects to be sponsored under GRF, decided to: (i) include a midterm RPC virtual meeting in the ECO Calendar of Events for 2021 to be held in June, (ii) request the Secretariat to prepare a concept paper on its proposal and submit it to CPR and COM for their evaluation and decision with a view to authorize the Secretary General for entering into at least 10 small sized feasibility study projects yearly, each having the worth of US\$ 10,000/- by utilizing GRF.

23. The Council requested the Secretariat to work on a set of rules for taking off the unattended Meetings and cooperation fields which do not induce required interest from the ECO Agenda and also requested to circulate this study to the member states within three months for getting their views and suggestions.

24. The Council agreed that while proposing a new programme or project, a preliminary study that includes the proposed project's cost-benefit analysis with its potential contribution to our cooperation will be presented to Member countries and the Secretariat in written and requested Secretariat to prepare a modality for proposing a new programme or project to that end.

25. The Council encouraged the Member States to express their willingness for virtually hosting the events reflected in the ECO Calendar of Event for 2021 for which venues to be decided latest by March 2021 or the Secretariat may organize those events virtually.

**Agenda Item No. 9**

Date and venue of the next Meeting

26. The Council decided to organize the next (32nd) meeting of RPC on January 16-19, 2022 at the ECO Secretariat in Tehran, if no Member State volunteers to host the event.

**Agenda Item No. 10**

Adoption of the Report of 31<sup>st</sup> RPC Meeting

27. The Report of the 31st Meeting of the ECO Regional Planning Council was unanimously adopted.

**Agenda Item No. 11**

Closing

28. The Council appreciated and thanked the ECO Secretary General and his team for making necessary arrangements for successful holding the online meeting of the RPC and preparation of relevant documents.

29. The Council concluded the meeting with a vote of thanks to the Chair for managing the meeting in a proactive, smooth and efficient manner. The Council also acknowledged and thanked the Chairmen of various Sectoral Committees for successfully conducting their tasks.

\*\*\*\*\*