

The 17th Meeting of the Council of Ministers

Herat Communiqué

(Herat, Afghanistan – 20 October 2007)

No. 17th COM/2007

The 17th Meeting of the Council of Ministers (COM) of the Economic Cooperation Organization (ECO) was held in Herat, the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan, on 20th October 2007. The meeting was chaired by H.E. Dr. Rangin Dadfar Spanta, Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan, and attended by the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan, the Republic of Azerbaijan, the Islamic Republic of Iran, the Republic of Kazakhstan, the Kyrgyz Republic, the Islamic Republic of Pakistan, the Republic of Tajikistan, the Republic of Turkey, Turkmenistan and the Republic of Uzbekistan as well as the ECO Secretary General. The representatives of international and regional organizations also participated in the meeting.

The President of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan, His Excellency Mr. Hamid Karzai, in his key-note address to the 17th Meeting of the Council of Ministers, welcoming the delegations and emphasizing the historical significance of holding the 17th COM in Herat, hoped that ECO would be able to foster the spirit of cooperation among the member states and transform the wishes of the people of region into reality. The President also pointed to the trend of globalization and called on the member states to improve the status of this region from being the subject of this trend to one of its players by further integration of resources and opening up cultural and scientific institutions to each other. The President renewed Afghanistan's commitment to the principles of ECO Charter and said that his Government would continue supporting the aims and objectives of the organization. He appreciated the initiative of ECO to contribute in the reconstruction process of Afghanistan.

1. Reviewing with satisfaction the progress made since the Baku COM held in May 2006, the Council:-

- (i) Welcomed progress towards conclusion and implementation of important ECO agreements, including the Transit Transport Framework Agreement (TTFA), ECO Trade Agreement (ECOTA), the Agreement on Promotion and Protection of Investment (APPI), the Articles of the Agreement for the Establishment of ECO Re-insurance Company, the Additional Protocol to the Charter of the ECO Science Foundation and the updated Statute of ECO College of Insurance.
- (ii) Expressed satisfaction over the increased frequency of sectoral meetings and, to further encourage this trend, sought greater participation of Member States and their cooperation to implement its decisions.

- (iii) Welcomed the efforts for operationalization of the ECO Science Foundation, establishment of ECO Regional Centre for Risk Management of Natural Disaster as well as the establishment of other ECO institutions.
- (iv) Commended the efforts made for the operationalization of the ECO Trade and Development Bank and expressed its satisfaction that the Bank would commence operations by the end of 2007. The Council also noted with satisfaction the efforts made towards establishment of the ECO Reinsurance Company and called on all Member States to join both Institutions.
- (v) Welcomed the efforts for the implementation of the ECO Projects and Programmes, especially revitalization of the Container and Passenger Trains from Istanbul to Almaty, commencement of Afghan Reconstruction Projects, extension of the Plan of Action for cooperation in the field of Environment up to 2010, publication of the ECO Annual Economic Report as also progress on the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs).

2. Reaffirmed its commitment to establish a free trade area in the ECO region by 2015 as a priority task, encouraged Member States to speed up implementation of the ECOTA and, noting with satisfaction the participation of the private sector in ECO programmes and activities, called for ECO-CCI to be reactivated by establishing a permanent secretariat and developing an action plan to make it more dynamic in strengthening trade relations among Member States.

3. Took note of the Inception Report prepared by NESPAK on the feasibility study on interconnection of power systems and encouraged member states to provide necessary data without further delay and the consulting company to finalize the feasibility study as early as possible.

4. Decided to extend the Programme of Action for ECO Decade of Transport and Communications (1998-2007) until the new programme is finalized and, stressing the importance of transport and communications and of effective measures for speedy implementation of the TTFA, called for removing all obstacles to the smooth running of the Container and Passenger Trains on the Trans-Asian Railway Mainline.

5. Appreciated the support and financial assistance of the Islamic Development Bank to ECO programmes/projects, and the technical support of FAO in preparing a Regional Programme for Food Security (RPFS) for the ECO region and thanked the Republic of Turkey for its readiness to host the Donor's Conference on 7-8 May, 2008.

6. Reaffirmed its commitment to jointly work for human resource development, social development, health and poverty alleviation as well as disaster mitigation and management.

7. Recognizing that narcotics, terrorism and transnational organized crimes are a threat to regional/national security, stability and economic growth of Member States, the Council called for accelerating joint efforts in this regard and appreciated the holding of the 1st ECO Interior Ministers meeting in Tehran and the offer of Turkmenistan to host the 2nd Meeting of the ECO Ministers for Interior in early 2008. The Council further proposed that Member States consider the possibility of transforming DCCU into a Regional Center for Drug Control and Organized Crime, and finalize issues relating to establishment of ECOPOL in the next meeting of the ECO Interior Ministers.

8. Noted with appreciation the financial contributions of the Islamic Republic of Iran, the Islamic Republic of Pakistan and the Republic of Turkey to the ECO Special Fund for the Reconstruction of Afghanistan and appealed to other Member States to make similar contributions and assist Afghanistan in capacity building where ever needed.

9. Welcomed the commencement of the construction of Deh Mazang Public Park and maintenance of Kabul Zoo, and asked for support to more of such projects to be undertaken with financing from the ECO Special Fund for Reconstruction of Afghanistan.

10. Appreciated the initiative of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan to name a Central Park in Herat as "ECO Park" to commemorate the 17th meeting of the Council of Ministers held in the historic city of Herat.

11. Recognized the importance of cooperation in the fields of culture and tourism including ecotourism and cultural tourism and recommended that member states step up efforts to expand cooperation in these fields.

12. Appreciated the active and invaluable efforts of H.E. Mr. Elmar Mammadyarov, the Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Azerbaijan, for the promotion of regional cooperation during his chairmanship of the ECO Council of Ministers, and felicitated H.E. Dr. Rangin Dadfar Spanta, the Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan, on assuming the Chairmanship of the Council. The Council assured him of full support and wished him complete success.

13. Expressed profound thanks and gratitude to His Excellency Mr. Hamid Karzai, President of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan, Dr. Rangin Dadfar Spanta, Minister of Foreign Affairs and Government officials of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan for their support and contributions to the 17th COM meeting held in Herat. The Council also thanked the ECO Secretary General and his staff for their efforts to make a success of the meeting.

Herat, 20th October 2007

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