

The 9th Summit
Statement of ECO Secretary General
(*Baku, 5 May, 2006*)

Annex-IV

*Honourable President of the
Republic of Azerbaijan,
Honourable Heads of State/Government/Delegation
Excellencies,
Distinguished Delegates,*

I deem it a great honour and privilege to have been provided this opportunity to present to the esteemed leadership of the ECO a report on the activities of our Organization since the Eighth Summit held in Dushanbe in September 2004. The meetings of Heads of State/Government are undoubtedly a valuable source of vigour and zeal to carry forward our joint efforts and programmes for the progress, prosperity and development of our region.

2. Before proceeding with my report, I wish to offer my felicitation to H.E. the President of Azerbaijan on his assumption of the Chairmanship of the Ninth ECO Summit Meeting. The unanimous expression of confidence in his stewardship of the Ninth ECO Summit Meeting is a befitting tribute to his eminence as a statesman and his commitment to ECO's goals and objectives. Under your leadership, Mr. Chairman, this meeting is assured of an outcome of immense value and far-reaching impact and promise for the future of our organization. I feel duty-bound to express our gratitude to the Government of Azerbaijan for the excellent arrangements and for their readily available cooperation extended to the Secretariat, for this Ninth ECO Summit Meeting.

3. We would be remiss without expressing our appreciation to the His Excellency the President of the Republic of Tajikistan, Mr. Emomali Rakhmonov for the ingenuity and dedication with which he guided our association since the Eighth Summit.

Mr. Chairman,

4. Your inaugural address as well as the statements of other esteemed leaders this morning were thought-provoking and provide valuable guidance for ECO to pursue its goals as an effective instrument of regional cooperation.

5. Since the last Summit held in Dushanbe in September 2004, we have attained good progress in many important areas. Yet, in some fields of activities the progress was not up to the level of our expectations. Following Dushanbe Summit, five sectoral Ministerial meetings have taken place. These include meetings on Environment, Agriculture, Trade & Investment, Industry and Transport & Communications. We are satisfied with the out come of these meetings as these undoubtedly contribute to further expanding cooperation in the relevant fields.

6. The world today is witnessing profound changes which will have far-reaching implications. Nowadays, given growing trend towards regional grouping phenomenon, ECO has a pivotal role to play as a truly effective vehicle for ushering the peoples of our region to a brighter and more prosperous future. Having almost completed its restructuring and planning phase, ECO is now poised to enter into the implementation phase of its programmes.

7. In order to bring ECO in line with the requirements of the changing world, the 15th COM held in Astana in October 2005 adopted ECO Vision 2015 which sets targets and goals to be attained by the Organization by 2015. These targets are not only confined to the priority areas such as Trade & Investment, Transport and Communications & Energy but also provide us guidelines for action in the non priority areas as well as in issues which are assuming greater importance such as the Environment and the Human Resource Development etc. The 15th COM also approved re-organization of the Secretariat in the light of recommendations made by the Eminent Persons' Group (EPG) with a view to enhance the efficiency and effectiveness of the Secretariat.

Excellencies,

8. It is gratifying that the members of ECO are on the road to economic growth and development due to the

prudent & farsighted economic policies of their leaders. While there has been significant improvement in their external trade, the volume of our intra-regional trade continues to remain far from satisfactory. Nonetheless, there is a steady progress in the ECO's initiatives which are aimed at gradual removal of tariff and non-tariff barriers in the ECO region. In this connection, we welcome the recent ratification by the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan of the ECO Trade Agreement (ECOTA). We hope that other members would also become a party to this Agreement soon.

9. We are also a step closer to the formal launch of the ECO Trade & Development Bank as the Governors/Directors of the Bank have been nominated. The first meeting of the Board of Governors is scheduled to take place in July this year in the Republic of Turkey to finalize the remaining formalities before the establishment and actual commencement of operations of the Bank.

10. There has also been considerable progress in the field of Transport & Communications. The long awaited Transit Transport Framework Agreement (TTFA) signed in 1998 will come into force on 19th May, 2006. This has been possible due to the ratification by the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan and now recently by the Islamic Republic of Iran. We are also hopeful that other members who have not yet signed or ratified this agreement will do so as soon as possible.

Mr. Chairman,

11. We continue to have some difficulties with regard to the smooth operationalization of container and passenger trains on the Istanbul–Almaty, Trans-Asian Railway Main Line. A Working Group mandated to discuss this subject is scheduled to meet in Tehran next month. However, the problems hampering the smooth running of these trains will not be resolved without a strong political will of the concerned Member States who fall on this route.

12. Cooperation amongst the Member States in other areas such as Energy, Environment, Industry, Agriculture, Tourism, Health and Human Resource Development continues at a reasonable pace. ECO continues to attach high priority to its participation in the international efforts aimed at the reconstruction of Afghanistan. A project for the Construction of Deh Mazang Public Park to be financed from the ECO's Special Support Fund is at the final stages of planning. I welcome the announcement just made by the Honourable Prime Minister of the Republic of Turkey pledging an amount of 5 million US Dollars for the ECO's Special Fund for the reconstruction of Afghanistan.

13. ECO's relations with other international and regional organizations continue to grow. Presently, we are also preparing to sign MoUs with the Islamic Chamber of Commerce & Industry, Shanghai Cooperation Organization, International Labour Organization (ILO) and International Maritime Organization (IMO). With a view to have an appraisal of the level of ECO's cooperation with other international organizations and to make it more meaningful, the Honourable Foreign Ministers yesterday approved outline Plan of Action to enhance external relations of ECO. May I take this opportunity to sincerely appreciate the participation of the international organizations namely, the Food & Agriculture Organization, the Islamic Development Bank and the Organisation of Islamic Conference in this august gathering.

Mr. Chairman,

14. It is my duty to appreciate the efforts of the Foreign Ministers to finalize and adopt the report of the 16th COM. The Honourable Chairman of the COM has just presented his report on the outcome of the 16th session of the Council to this august body.

15. My term as the Secretary General of the Organization will come to an end in August this year. It has been a singular honour for me to have been associated with this Organization since January 2004. Allow me, Honourable Heads of State and Government, to thank you for the support that I have received from you today and also from the Honourable Foreign Ministers during the 16th COM yesterday and also at other occasions since my appointment as the Secretary General of ECO. I would like to take this opportunity to sincerely congratulate His Excellency Mr. Khurshid Anwar from the Islamic Republic of Pakistan, who has been appointed as the new Secretary General by the 16th COM yesterday. Mr. Anwar brings with him wealth of experience and deep insight on regional issues. I am confident that under your guidance, he will lead ECO to greater heights.

16. Before I conclude, I would wish to once again thank the Government of the Republic of Azerbaijan for hosting the 16th COM and the 9th summit meetings in Baku and the Member States for their participation and valuable contributions to the deliberations of the meetings.

Thank you.

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