

Secretary General's Recommendations

(Herat, Afghanistan – 20 October 2007)

No. 17th COM/2007

The 17th Meeting of the Council of Ministers, Herat, 20th October 2007

Excellencies,

In my detailed report, which is placed before you, I have covered the activities that ECO has pursued since the previous COM held in Baku (May 2006). I would not restate them here. Instead, I would like to touch on the main difficulties we are facing, and seek your guidance and support to overcome them:

i. **Implementation of agreements**

ECO has laid an institutional framework for cooperation in diverse fields. We have concluded important agreements, MOUs and related documents. We must not allow them to remain unimplemented indefinitely. To illustrate my point, the Izmir Treaty of September 1996 which is the bedrock of this organization is yet to be ratified by three States. An agreement as important as ECOTA is yet to be signed by half of our Member States. I would urge early signing and ratification of ECO agreements and related documents by all member states.

ii. **Participation in meetings**

Participation of member states in ECO meetings has improved over the past one year. We were able to hold 74 percent of the scheduled meetings in 2006 and hope to raise it to 80 percent this year. This compares well with 46 percent each in 2004 and 2005. The average number of participating States has been raised from 6 to 8. I see no reason why it should not be possible to hold all of our scheduled events and with each one of the ten Member States participating. Also, it is less than fair that some Member States should host most meetings and others none at all. Some have, indeed, not hosted any ECO meeting at all for a long time. I have approached them separately on this subject and would appreciate their early affirmative response.

iii. **Follow-up action**

The success of meetings and the importance of decisions they take lie in the follow-up action. It requires the active involvement and cooperation of Member States. Many a time, the real action lies with Member States. The Secretariat's efforts may go waste if not matched with a positive response. In order to expedite action, we have been trying to make maximum use of the national focal points. Unfortunately, focal points are not available for some of the very countries who

need most a close coordination for follow-up action. I would request greater support of member states on this point.

iv. **The Secretariat's capacity**

ECO's aims and objectives, and various events and meetings held in pursuit thereof, require sustained efforts. The Secretariat must have the necessary capacity to do justice to these and related responsibilities. The present quality of our personnel is well below the mark. I sincerely request Member States that they make nominations against the Secretariat posts purely on merit, proposing officers who have the requisite qualifications and competence.

v. **Budgetary contributions**

ECO's annual budget, which is one of the most modest among regional organizations, comprises mandatory contributions from Member States. The amount they pay is agreed and the time of payment known. Yet we face difficulties every year in getting contributions from some Member States. Just to give you a measure of the seriousness of the problem, with less than a quarter of the year left, we have received full contributions from only 5 States, part payment from another two and, no payment at all from the remaining three. I would particularly urge early clearance of budgetary arrears which have been due for several years.

vi. **Support on long-delayed projects**

It has been my effort to revive ECO's long delayed, almost forgotten, yet important, projects. These include the ECO Science Foundation, the ECO Reinsurance Company, the ECO Container and Passenger Trains. On the Science Foundation, to mention briefly, the 3rd COM decided as far back as 1993 that this foundation be established by 1995. Yet by 2007, we could barely organize the first EGM. I am grateful to the Government of Pakistan for hosting that meeting and appreciate both Pakistan and Iran for contributing US\$ 1 million and \$ 100,000 respectively to the Science Foundation Fund. I request the support and contributions of all Member States to make a success of this long-delayed project.

vii. **Special Support Fund (SSF)**

Delegates from Member States are paid travel cost to encourage participation in ECO meetings. It is paid from the organization's budget, on the most economical routes and subject to a ceiling of US\$500. Only in two cases can travel cost be paid up to \$900. We have been receiving complaints, mainly, from our Central Asian Member States, about the inadequacy of the amount offered. It is recommended that the CPR review the present travel expenses to make them more realistic.

viii. **Salary Scales**

The salary structure, DSA and rent of the ECO residence in Tehran need to be reviewed. The salary scales, adopted in 1996, were revised only once in October 2005. These have fallen far behind the annual inflation, creeping at over 15 percent (in Tehran). We are already having difficulty in attracting qualified staff. It is recommended that pay scales and DSA for the Secretariat personnel be reviewed in accordance with Chapter V of ECO Staff Regulations, preferably through readjustment in the next year's budget. The rent of SG's residence has not been raised since 1997. There is a genuine need to increase it reasonably. The CPR may be authorized to review it.

Excellencies,

ECO, as the main vehicle of cooperation among the countries of our region, holds great hope and promise. It can achieve far more than it has so far. However, it needs a greater ownership by Member States. We have to participate more actively in ECO events and take follow-up action in a time-bound manner. ECO has to be given the support it merits so it can produce what is expected of it. It is a resilient organization and has proven this by picking more momentum these past few years. We have to sustain this trend. I am confident that, with the support of the Member States, we would be able to achieve our present targets and much more in the months and years ahead.