

## **The 13<sup>th</sup> Council of Ministers**

### **Bishkek Joint Communiqué**

*( Bishkek, 11 June, 2003 )*

*Annex-VII*

The 13<sup>th</sup> meeting of the Council of Ministers (COM) of Economic Cooperation Organization (ECO) was held in Bishkek, the capital of the Kyrgyz Republic, on June 9-11, 2003. The meeting, chaired by H.E. Mr. Askar Aitmatov, Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Kyrgyz Republic, was attended by the delegations of the Transitional Islamic State of Afghanistan, Republic of Azerbaijan, Islamic Republic of Iran, Republic of Kazakhstan, Kyrgyz Republic, Islamic Republic of Pakistan, Republic of Tajikistan, Republic of Turkey, Turkmenistan and Republic of Uzbekistan. International organizations namely UNCTAD, IDB, FAO, ICARDA, UNFPA and UNDP also participated in the meeting.

2. His Excellency Mr. Askar Akaev, the President of the Kyrgyz Republic, inaugurated the meeting. In his statement containing guidelines for ECO activities, he expressed the hope that the principle of mutual cooperation, supported by shared cultural and regional affinities, would continue to help the member states overcome the operational impediments to realize the aspirations of over 350 million people of ECO region for regional economic development and prosperity.

3. The Council reviewed the overall progress of the Organization since its last meeting held in Istanbul on October 12, 2002, especially in implementation of the decisions of the meeting. Keeping in view the broader goals of ECO, the Council expressed satisfaction over the growing implementation of various programmes and projects in the fields of Transport & Communications; Trade & Investment; Energy, Minerals & Environment, Agriculture, Drug Control as well as ECO relations with international organizations.

4. The Council stressed the need of trade liberalization efforts within the ECO framework with a view to promoting regional trade. The Council appreciated the work done by the High Level Experts Group on Tariff and Non-Tariff Barriers on drafting the ECO Trade Agreement and expressed the hope that the draft would be finalized at the next meeting of the HLEG and signed at the 2<sup>nd</sup> Ministerial meeting on Commerce/Foreign Trade to be held in Pakistan on July 15-17, 2003.

5. The Council asked the member states to work for expansion of intra-regional trade through early finalization and implementation of ECO Trade Agreement, closer cooperation in trade liberalization and facilitation, investment, regulatory issues and improving institutional framework. Mindful of the pivotal role of the ECO Chamber of Commerce and Industry (CCI) and the need for enhanced interaction between the trade chambers of the member states, the Council reaffirmed its resolve to strengthen the interaction amongst the private sector in the member states to maximize the benefits of regional cooperation. The Council welcomed the proposal to have a permanent secretariat for ECO-CCI and took note of the offer of the Republic of Turkey to seat the Secretariat of ECO-CCI in Istanbul.

6. The Council also welcomed the ongoing efforts to establish an ECO Smuggling and Customs Offences Data Bank in Turkey as decided at the 2<sup>nd</sup> meeting of the ECO Council of Heads of Customs Administration held in Tehran on September 2, 2002.

7. While emphasizing the role of Ministerial meetings in various sectors in steering the activities of the organization, the Council expressed the confidence that the decision taken by it to hold the meetings of the Finance/Economy Ministers of the ECO member states on an institutionalized basis on the pattern of ECO Ministerial meetings in other sectors would open new avenues for enhancing cooperation in this vital area and for accelerating the process of achieving the ECO objectives.

8. The Council noted with satisfaction the efforts of the ECO in the fields of agricultural development, Transport, Communications, Energy, Trade, sharing of information on drugs production and trafficking, collection of data on smuggling and Customs Offences etc and welcomed the decisions taken at various Ministerial/Official level meetings. It further urged the member states to implement these decisions in the interest of regional development and economic prosperity. The Council also expressed the hope for a speedy progress on the process of inter-connection of power systems of the ECO region.

9. Further, the Council observed that the relevant authorities of the member states should fully cooperate with the ECO Secretariat to schedule the proposed events and activities for 2003 and 2004 to ensure implementation of the ECO decisions. In this respect, the Ministers re-emphasized the need to make necessary preparations for the proposed Ministerial meetings of Commerce/Foreign Trade (July 2003, Pakistan), Information Communications Technology (November 2003, Tehran), Energy/ Petroleum (Tehran), Environment (Turkey, 2004), Agriculture (Turkey, 2004) and Transport & Communications (2004).

10. The Council took note of the activities of international, regional and UN bodies in multiple areas in the region and asked the member states to make optimal use of the forces of synergy. In this way, the member states would ensure faster development of projects and their implementation with the technical support of the international community. The Council also agreed to pursue a joint strategy to safeguard and promote the interests of the member states in international fora.

11. The Council considered with interest the initiatives of the member states to promote their accession to international conventions and agreements in the fields of transport, trade and customs to develop and introduce internationally acceptable practices and models for closer integration with the global trading and transport systems. The Ministers hoped that this would result in simplification as well as standardization of procedures necessary to manage the complex issues of transport and trade.

12. The Council hoped that early establishment of ECO Trade & Development Bank and ECO Re-Insurance Company and ECO Science Foundation would provide more impetus to the regional cooperation in the relevant fields. The Council encouraged those member states that have yet not joined the only two operational institutions/agencies i.e. ECO Cultural Institute and ECO Shipping Company to do so at the earliest.

13. Reaffirming that human resource development in the ECO region was of paramount importance for the overall development of the member states, the Council called for organizing human resource development programmes with special emphasize on empowerment of women and their due share in the development process of the member states.

14. The Council, while recognizing the fact that majority of the member states were landlocked, reiterated high priority for development of transit transport and trade systems in the region. It confirmed its support for the Almaty-Istanbul passenger and container train trajectory. The Council underlined the need and importance of access of the landlocked member states to the waterways for the trade development of the region. In this context the Council expressed the hope that the TTFA and TTA would be harmonized and operationalized soon. Further, it underlined the need to effectively pursue ECO objectives in parallel with their national priorities with respect to completing missing road and railway links.

15. The Council stressed the need to enhance the efficiency and accelerate the pace of progress towards achievement of the Organization's goals and objectives as enshrined in the Treaty of Izmir. In this respect, the Council decided to set up an Eminent Persons Group (EPG) with specific mandate to recommend measures in collaboration with the ECO Secretary General for improving effectiveness and efficiency of ECO and submit its report to the 14<sup>th</sup> COM for approval.

16. The Council appreciated as a sign of solidarity the support extended by the member states to the Transitional Islamic State of Afghanistan in its efforts to carry out reconstruction projects. The Council requested the member states to urge the international community to remain engaged in Afghanistan to ensure peace and stability which would not be possible without the reconstruction and rehabilitation of Afghanistan. In this respect, the Council asked the member states to take effective steps for the early convening of the Financial Experts' meeting to finalize the modalities for establishment of ECO Special Fund for Reconstruction of Afghanistan and implementation of those programmes in the Plan of Action which enjoy the support of the member states for reconstruction in Afghanistan. The Council urged the member states to support the efforts being made by the Government of Afghanistan for promotion of peace and stability in Afghanistan, which is vital for the economic development of the region.

17. The Council welcomed the expanding relations of the Organization with other regional organizations, international financial institutions as well as UN bodies with special reference to the UNGA resolutions pertaining to cooperation with ECO. Also, the Council appreciated ECO's growing relations with IDB, UNESCAP, UNCTAD, FAO,

ASEAN, Colombo Plan, ITC, IMF, World Bank, UNEP, UNESCO, UNFPA, UNECE, WCO, WTO, UNDP, UNODCCP and IRU.

18. The Council welcomed the Resolution of the 57<sup>th</sup> Session of the UN General Assembly declaring 2003 as the “Year of Kyrgyz Statehood” and invited member states to actively participate in the forthcoming celebrations of the Kyrgyz Statehood in Kyrgyzstan.

19. The Council while appreciating the incumbent Secretary General His Excellency Ambassador Seyed Mojtaba Arastou for his invaluable efforts for achievement of ECO objectives, appointed H.E. Dr. Bekzhasar Narbayev as the new Secretary General of ECO for the term August 2003 to August 2006. The Council also appointed Mr. Muhammad Ali Shoaei as the President of the ECO Cultural Institute and wished him a successful term.

20. The Council appreciated the invaluable efforts for the promotion of regional cooperation made by Deputy Prime Minister & Foreign Minister of the Republic of Turkey H.E. Dr. Abdullah Gül and the Turkish Chairmanship of the ECO Council of Ministers. It also felicitated H.E. Mr. Askar Aitmatov, Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Kyrgyz Republic on assuming the Chairmanship of the ECO Council of Ministers. The Council assured him of its support and cooperation during the period of his Chairmanship.

21. The Council expressed profound gratitude and thanks to His Excellency Mr. Askar Akaev, the President of the Kyrgyz Republic, the Minister for Foreign Affairs and all other Government officials of the Kyrgyz Republic for their commendable support and contribution in the successful organization of the meeting in Bishkek. The Council also thanked the ECO Secretary General and his staff for their contribution to the successful conclusion of this meeting.