

**AT THE 18TH REGIONAL PLANNING COUNCIL MEETING OF THE ECONOMIC  
COOPERATION ORGANISATION**

**The Secretary General's Statement**

*(Islamabad, March 3-6, 2008)*

**Your Excellency  
Dr. Mohammad Akram Sheikh,  
Federal Minister and Deputy Chairman,  
Planning Commission of Pakistan,  
Your Excellency, Mr. Ghiasuddin Ahmed,  
Federal Secretary Planning  
and Development Division,  
Government of Pakistan,  
Honorable Ambassadors,  
Distinguished delegates,  
Ladies and gentlemen,**

It is a great privilege for me to extend a warm welcome to you at the inauguration of this 18<sup>th</sup> meeting of the ECO Regional Planning Council. I express my sincere thanks to the Government of Pakistan, in particular, the Planning and Development Division, for hosting this important event. I am grateful to the Honorable Deputy Chairman of Planning Commission for sparing time to grace this occasion. I acknowledge, with thanks, the participation of distinguished delegates from all ECO member states. Your presence promises rich and rewarding deliberations over the next few days. We also have with us this morning our brothers from the Turkish Cypriot State. I extend a very warm welcome to them and thank them for joining us.

**Excellencies,**

The Regional Planning Council that meets here today plays a key role in promoting the aims and objectives of ECO. Its deliberations bear directly on the shape and content of ECO's policies and programs. These set the pace and the tone of ECO events and activities. These determine, to a great extent, the direction of our efforts and the degree of their success. The RPC meeting in Islamabad is particularly important. It comes a few months before we hold in this same city the 10<sup>th</sup> summit meeting of our ten member countries. We have in this session of the RPC a welcome opportunity to plan a string of events that will culminate in the summit, that will contribute to, indeed must, make it a total success, ---!

**Distinguished delegates,**

ECO activities picked a fresh momentum since the last meeting of the RPC, held in Tehran in February 2007. This is evident from the increased number of ECO meetings, the participation of more member states and at a higher level as

also from an improved overall outcome. This would not have been possible without the support of member states. We have to maintain, indeed magnify this support, this interest and commitment. We have to translate it into realizing ECO's over-arching vision – our shared vision of regional economic integration; integration among the member states themselves and their integration with the global economy.

We have reasons to feel encouraged. We have today far greater potential to achieve this cherished goal. It is reflected in the steady improvement of our economies. These were never more robust. Our aggregate GDP, for the first time, exceeded US\$ 1 trillion. According to IMF, the aggregate GDP of ECO countries amounted US\$ 1093 billion. ECO's share in global trade amounted to US\$496.3 billion and our intra-regional trade to US\$38 billion in 2006. Investment inflows into the region rose by over one hundred percent to US\$35.8 billion in 2006 from US\$16.6 billion a year earlier.

### **Distinguished delegates,**

ECO had a productive year in 2007. Frankly, it could have been even better. The pace was not even; it was not equally brisk in all areas. In trade, our highest priority, we crossed an important milestone with the completion of the requisite ratification of the ECO Trade Agreement (ECOTA) by five member states. Our Cooperation Council will meet in Turkey next month to process implementation. The ECO Trade and Development Bank has been set up, with headquarters in Istanbul. Its distinguished President has so kindly joined us today and will enlighten us on the Bank's progress. The Agreement on Promotion and Protection of Investment has also moved closer to implementation. Iran joined the signatory states last month and Pakistan is ready to follow suit soon.

The ECO Reinsurance Company will be in place shortly. The Articles of the Agreement have been agreed and will be signed in a few weeks. Harmonization of customs procedures is being pursued as is the establishment of a Smuggling and Customs Offences Data Bank. The 6<sup>th</sup> meeting of the CHCA made significant progress in their meeting in Baku in September, 2007. The ECO-CCI has been reactivated, with its Secretariat shifted to Istanbul. Greater involvement of the private sector is our priority. The Honorable Secretary General of the ECO-CCI is with us and will let us know more about it in a later session.

### **Excellencies,**

In transport, implementation of TTFA has been underway since May 2006. Lately, we have set up a special Fund to accelerate the process. The operations of the ECO container and passenger trains on Istanbul-Almaty route are being streamlined. The travel time has been shortened by more than 36 hours. Plans are being drawn up to extend the route to Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan. Transport

cooperation would come under detailed review when the ECO Transport Ministers meet in Antalya, Turkey next month.

In the energy sector, the feasibility study for interconnection of the power systems of member states has suffered some delay. It was examined by an Expert Level Meeting in Islamabad last month. Another study on the subject has been conducted in cooperation with World Bank. It would be reviewed in the 2<sup>nd</sup> ECO-WB Workshop in July this year in Tehran. Power trade would also be the subject of the inter-regional Working Group in coordination with UNESCAP. It would meet in July.

In the mineral field, Iran is spearheading an effort to establish the ECO Geosciences Database and compile a Mineral Distribution Map of the region. Iran is financing this project, with some support from the ECO Feasibility Study Fund. On environment, the 4<sup>th</sup> ECO Ministerial Meeting scheduled for Islamabad this year would review implementation of the Plan of Action, a Work Plan on Biodiversity and a study on the region's ecotourism.

### **Excellencies,**

Cooperation in the fight against terrorism, drug trafficking and transnational organized crimes is an important ECO priority. It would be the subject of three successive meetings in the next as many months. These include one in the Kish Island of Iran next week, organized jointly with IOM. Another will be an HLEG meeting in Ankara next month and, in May we would hold the 2<sup>nd</sup> ECO Interior Minister's Meeting in Ashgabat.

In agriculture, we are pressing ahead with the Regional Program for Food Security. It is aimed at increasing the food production capacity of ECO countries. A related program focuses on efficient production of seed, harmonization of seed laws and setting up a seed marketing system. Last month, I signed a letter of agreement with the Iranian Government to set up the ECO Agricultural Biotechnology Network. In September last year, we opened in Mashhad the ECO Regional Centre for Risk Management of Natural Disasters. It would help member states prepare programmes for mitigation of natural disasters, develop early warning mechanisms and monitor weather and environmental conditions.

### **Distinguished delegates,**

In industry, the 3<sup>rd</sup> ECO Industry Minister's Meeting (Lahore, November 2006) marked a milestone. Follow-up action is underway, in particular, for the establishment of the ECO Technology Transfer Centre, SME's Development and setting up the Regional Institute for Standardization, Conformity Assessment, Accreditation and Metrology (RISCAM). Progress has been made in the three meetings held since Lahore. We hope to give it final touches in the 4<sup>th</sup> Industry Minister's Meeting this year. On privatization, meetings of HLEG and the Heads of

Privatization Administrations (Islamabad, April 2007) took concrete decisions to intensify cooperation. In their next meeting in Turkey in April, they would review progress made so far and approve new measures.

ECO's role in the reconstruction of Afghanistan has not picked the desired momentum. We could barely initiate only one project during the past three years. A second project has been lately approved in Faryab Province. We have a lot of catching up to do. We must initiate at least three new medium-size projects this year. This would require the support of member states which, I hope, they would extend generously.

### **Excellencies,**

ECO has put in place necessary institutional framework for regional cooperation. It is important that the agreements we have reached should be extended full backing by all member states. Without it, the desired impact and effect will not be possible to realize. We must all sign and speed up implementing the ECO agreements. Unless this be done and with due sense of urgency, many of our cherished goals might remain elusive.

The calendar of events that we draw up in this RPC meeting must be realistic. It should carry forward ECO's aims and objectives. Yet it must not overstretch our resources. In addition, we have to implement the 17<sup>th</sup> COM decision that every member state must host, at least, two events in a year. Equally important is it that all member states should participate in every ECO meeting and at the appropriate level. Already, we have reduced postponing events. We have to eliminate this altogether.

Regional meetings are important, no doubt, yet these are no end in themselves. Their worth and value lies in implementing the decisions they take. This requires vigorous follow-up action, jointly by the Secretariat and all member states. Our interest must not wane as soon as a meeting ends. That should indeed be the time to shift to a higher gear. Effective follow-up action necessitates sustained support from all member States.

In conclusion, Excellencies, our organization has great potential. Together, we have to realize it to the best advantage of our peoples. I am confident that, in the high traditions of ECO, this RPC meeting would hold focused and constructive deliberations. I wish you total success.

I thank you, Sir.