

The 17th RPC Meeting

Statement by H.E. Mr. Moustafa Sarmadi, Deputy Minister for Foreign Trade of the Islamic Republic of Iran

(ECO Secretariat, Tehran, 19 February, 2007)

In the Name of God, the Almighty

***Excellencies,
Distinguished Heads of Delegations
Ladies and Gentlemen,***

At the beginning I would like to express my deepest satisfaction for holding the 17th Meeting of the Regional Planning Council of ECO. I welcome all distinguished guests and participants and wish you a pleasant stay in Tehran.

Excellencies,

As you are aware in the previous year we witnessed adoption of the Transit Transport Framework Agreement as a binding instrument which was the result of the efforts of ECO member states experts and representatives in the course of long years. With the purpose of putting this Agreement into force, the delegation of the Islamic Republic of Iran in the first Meeting of Transit Transport Coordination Council played very active role and presented fruitful expert views on the formation of four committees of insurance, railway, roads and legal affairs. It is hoped that in the light of adoptions of the future meetings of the said four committees we will witness implementation of the Articles of TTFA which provides a good basis for promotion of the status of the ECO member states in the regional and global transportation and communication sector.

Given the privileges of use of the railway networks and its high status in the plans and projects of the ECO member states and with the purpose of implementation of the cargo and passenger train projects the first meeting of Trans-Asian Working Group was successfully held in Tehran in June 2006 during which fruitful decisions were adopted for implementation of the said project. Within this context it is expected that in the wake of the successful and fruitful visit of the Secretary General to Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan and later the visit of a delegation from Iran, as the coordinating country, accompanied by the representative of the ECO Secretariat to Uzbekistan in the last week, the last obstacles to the full implantation of the cargo and passenger train project in the region will be removed and all countries located along this transportation route become connected to each other.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Establishment of ECO Development and Trade Bank which started its official activities in the middle of the last year was another important event within ECO.

This bank with the capital of 1.4bn US\$ will facilitate and promote implementation of development projects and trade cooperation among the member states. The Islamic Republic of Iran which actively participated in all stage of the establishment of this bank is also going to make immense efforts to extend activities of this bank and create its branches in different countries.

As another important development with respect to the regional cooperation we can refer to the preparation of ECO Trade Agreement (ECOTA) which will facilitate trade exchanges among ECO member states. We shall notify that on the basis of this Agreement the tariffs ceiling of %80 of goods will decrease to maximum of %15 within a period of 8 years. I am very pleased to inform you the distinguished participants that adoption process of ECOTA by the concerned Iranian authorities is in its final stages and with the adoption of this Agreement in other member states it will hopefully be put in force in the near future.

Iranian proposals on the revision of the ECO Reinsurance Constitution as well as the text of the additional protocol to the Agreement on visa facilities for traders and businessmen of ECO member states have been distributed among the member states and it is expected that the adopted text will be submitted to the next Council of Ministers of ECO for the final approval. We hope that the related text will be finalized as immediate as possible and put into force accordingly.

Distinguished Participants,

As you have already been informed, the Islamic Development Bank, with providing a 400/000 US\$ credit, has agreed to make studies on the possibility of connection of electricity networks of the ECO member states. It is hoped that the selected contractor will expedite the implementation of this project in order for us to be able to consider the related results in the future Meeting of the Regional Planning Council and make the required decisions in this respect.

Preparation and adoption of the statute of the Regional Standardization Organization (RISCOM) in the meetings of senior experts, Heads of Standard Organization and Ministries of Industries of the member states as well as the special working group, were among other achievements of ECO in the industrial sector of Council of Ministers, this statute will be adopted and signed.

Distinguished Colleagues,

The Islamic Republic of Iran is going to grant fellowships to ten citizens of the ECO member states in order for them to continue their education in the field of management at B.A level in the ECO college of Insurance. So for countries of Azerbaijan, Afghanistan, Kyrgyzstan, Pakistan, and Tajikistan have sent their applications in this respect which shall be considered and decided according and later their volunteers will be informed in this regard. Here I avail myself of this opportunity to remind those countries who have not yet introduced their volunteers, to do it as soon as possible for enabling us to carry out the related procedures for them as well.

Distinguished Colleagues,

If we take a short look at the activities of ECO in the last few years we see that by God blessings, ECO has gradually passed through the ground preparing and planning phase and within the frame work of ECO Vision 2015 in which the move towards regional cooperation in the future and the final objective for creating the free trade area have been defined – has entered a new operational phase. It must be notified that implementation of ratified instruments and agreements within ECO requires promotion of understanding, empathy and participation of all member states.

But among other important working priorities of ECO in the next year we can refer to the following:

- Promoting the idea of regional integrity and preventing certain member states, of being sidelined.
- Promoting the secretariat and activities of the National Focal Point (NFPs) within member states and facilitating the inter-regional cooperation between ECO and other regional organization.
- Removing technical obstacles to the full implementation of TTFA.
- Putting ECOTA into force,
- Promoting cooperation in the cooperation in the field of regional environment and implementing decisions of the 3rd Ministerial Meeting,
- Promoting activities of ECO Cultural Institution
- Promoting and developing scientific cooperation through ECO Science Foundation activities.
- Extending activities of ECO Development and Trade Bank and immediate establishment of its branches in Tehran and Islamabad,
- Implementing decisions of the first meeting of Interior Ministers of ECO member states with the purpose of defining the border and security cooperation and combating security, economic and social threats including drug-trafficking, human smuggling, money laundry and terrorism.

Excellencies,

With the purpose of reaching sublime objectives of ECO, we expect all member states to make the required efforts for on time implementation of their commitments and embark on their active participation in holding main and specialized meetings of the organization in order to put the joint projects into force. It goes without saying that promotion of the spirit of integrity within ECO will assist further regional economic development and growth and will promote the understanding and cooperation among ECO member states.

In conclusion, I would like to reiterate that the Islamic Republic of Iran as one of the founding members of ECO, is actively and seriously committed to participating in the ECO plans and projects and within this context is voicing its full support for ECO activities in line with its foreign policies which favor establishment of peace and stability in the region and good relations with its neighboring as well as all Muslim states.

Thank you very much