

# The 16<sup>th</sup> RPC Meeting

## Report

( Tehran, January 30 - February 02, 2006 )

1. The Sixteenth Meeting of the Regional Planning Council (RPC) of the Economic Cooperation Organization (ECO) was held on January 30 – February 02, 2006 at the ECO Secretariat, Tehran. Preparatory/Review meetings were also held on the sidelines of the RPC meeting.

2. The Council was attended by the delegations of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan, the Republic of Azerbaijan, the Islamic Republic of Iran, the Republic of Kazakhstan, the Kyrgyz Republic, the Islamic Republic of Pakistan, the Republic of Tajikistan, the Republic of Turkey, the Republic of Uzbekistan. The delegation of ECO Secretariat headed by H.E. Mr. Askhat Orazbay, Secretary General also participated in the meeting. The meeting was also attended by the representatives of the Turkish Cypriot State. The representatives of ECO Specialized Agencies/Regional Institutes i.e. ECO Cultural Institute, ECO College of Insurance and ECO Consultancy & Engineering Company (ECO-CEC) also participated in the meeting. The list of participants is placed at **Annex-I**.

### **Agenda Item No. 1**

#### Inauguration of the Meeting

3. The meeting was inaugurated by H.E. Dr. Ali Reza Tahmasebi, Minister of Industries and Mines of the Islamic Republic of Iran. In his inaugural statement, Dr. Tahmasebi stated that the ECO Member States in the recent years have been experiencing considerable economic growth and development and that in line with the region's economic and political developments, ECO has managed to stabilize its position during 1990s and has entered the stage of active contribution. Expressing his satisfaction at the increase in the number of sectoral ministerial meetings, he pointed out that these meetings had increased by 88 percent in the past five years as compared to the 1990s. He informed the meeting that the Islamic Republic of Iran was at the final stages of ratification of ECO Transit Transportation Framework Agreement (TTFA). The Minister concluded his statement by reaffirming his country's decisive support for the plans and activities of the Organization. A copy of his statement is attached at **Annex-II**.

4. H.E. Mr. Askhat Orazbay, Secretary General ECO in his statement highlighted important achievements of the Organization in the year 2005. He informed the participants about the progress made by the Organization in areas such as Trade & Investment, Transport and Communications and Energy etc. Referring to the ECO Vision 2015 adopted by the 15<sup>th</sup> Council of Ministers (COM) held at Astana in October 2005, the Secretary General requested the delegates to keep the provisions of the ECO Vision 2015 in mind while formulating future activities of this Organization. The Secretary General also requested the Member States to draw the Calendar of Events for the year 2006 – 2007 in such a way so that only very important events were finalized and implemented during the course of next two years. A copy of his statement is attached at **Annex-III**.

### **Agenda Item No. 2**

#### Election of the Chairman

5. H.E. Sheikh Attar, Deputy Foreign Minister of the Islamic Republic of Iran was unanimously elected as the Chairman of the meeting.

6. In his statement, H.E. Sheikh Attar stated that the adoption of ECO Vision 2015 was a turning point in the history of the Organization. He advised that RPC must concentrate on the resources of the Organization and focus on priorities stipulated in the ECO Vision 2015. A copy of his statement is attached at **Annex-IV**.

### **Agenda Item No. 3**

#### Adoption of the Agenda

7. The Council adopted its following agenda:-

1. Inauguration of the Meeting.
  - Inaugural statement of the high dignitary from Iran
  - Statement of the ECO Secretary General

2. Election of the Chairman.
3. Adoption of the Agenda.
4. Statements by the Heads of Delegation.
5. Institutionalization of the relations between the Secretariat and the Relevant Focal Points of Member States at the national levels for regular coordination in each area of activity.
6. Review of ECO's priorities laid down in the Economic Cooperation Strategy and implementation of the ECO Vision 2015.
7. Consideration of the report of the Secretary General on ECO activities for 2005.
8. Reviewing progress of implementation of ECO's approved programmes of action and projects and consideration of the new programmes and projects for the year 2006 in the following areas:
  - Trade and Investment;
  - Transport & Communications;
  - Energy, Minerals and Environment;
  - Agriculture, Industry and Tourism
  - Human Resources & Sustainable Development;
  - Project Research and Economic Research & Statistics;
  - Inter-Regional ECO Activities
  - i. ECO Regional Institutions and Specialized Agencies
  - ii. International relations
9. Annual ECO Calendar of Events for 2006-2007
10. Preparation of Annual Economic Report
11. Any other business.
12. Date and Venue of the next Meeting.
13. Adoption of the Report.
14. Vote of Thanks

**Agenda Item No. 4**

Statements by the Heads of Delegation

8. The heads of participating delegation made opening statements, outlining their policies and views on the projects/programmes and activities of the Organization. Copies of the statements made available to the Secretariat are placed at **Annex-V**.

**Agenda Item No. 5**

Institutionalization of the relations between the Secretariat and the Relevant Focal Points of Member States at the national levels for regular coordination in each area of activity

9. The Council decided in the Plenary (Opening Session) that respective Review Committee meetings can discuss the issue and come out with concrete proposals. At the recommendations of the Review Committee meetings, the Council:-

- Reiterated that it is imperative for the Secretariat to institutionalize relations with the NFPs of member states in different fields in order to ensure active participation of member states in regional projects and events, regular coordination in each area of activity and follow up action towards the implementation of approved programmes and plans.

- Welcomed EPG's recommendations as adopted by the 15<sup>th</sup> COM that called for energizing, the role of the member states in the ECO activities particularly by the ECO focal points in the Ministries of Foreign Affairs as well as in other Ministries/organizations of the member states.
- Appreciated the efforts of the Secretariat for the preparation and distribution of the Directory of NFPs and requested the member states to provide necessary information with regard to their NFPs on a regular basis so that the Directory could be updated and printed frequently.
- Considered the proposal put forward by some member states regarding the establishment of ECO field offices as a means to enhance and institutionalize relations between the ECO Secretariat and NFPs of the member states. In view of the financial implications of the proposal, the Council observed that the issue required thorough and careful consideration. The Council, therefore, requested the Secretariat to expedite the preparation of the study on the issue requested by the COM and present it to CPR for consideration and necessary action. The Council further observed that once the proposal would be found feasible by the decision making authorities, the Secretariat will be called upon to implement the same in selected member states on trial basis.

#### **Agenda Item No. 6**

##### Review of ECO's priorities laid down in the Economic Cooperation Strategy and implementation of the ECO Vision 2015

10. The Council agreed that respective Review Committees, while discussing the issue, may also carefully consider recommendations contained in the ECO Vision 2015 and come out with proposals to add in the targets contained in ECO vision 2015. Following decisions emerged in the light of discussions on the subject in various Review Committees:

- The Council took note of the EPG's recommendation which stated that the ECO should not only continue to give priority to cooperation in transport, trade and energy but also attach greater importance to issues such as human development, poverty alleviation, environment, agriculture and industry at national and regional levels.
- The Council also welcomed the adoption of the ECO Vision 2015 as a basic reference document of ECO which sets up the strategy for regional economic cooperation during the next decade within the above-mentioned spheres. The Vision along with the Economic Cooperation Strategy should be the main framework for discussions and deliberations at the future meetings of RPC and other policy making organs of ECO.

#### **Agenda Item No.7**

##### Consideration of the report of the Secretary General on ECO activities for 2005

11. The Secretary General of ECO presented his annual report to the Council on the activities of the Organization during 2005. The Secretary General apprised the Council, in detail, of the significant features of the activities of the Organization. The Secretary General's report to 16<sup>th</sup> RPC was circulated vide Secretariat's Note Verbale No. SG/16<sup>th</sup> RPC/2006/001 dated January 2, 2006.

12. The Council appreciated the comprehensive report presented by the Secretary General and took note of the useful observations and suggestions which were reflected in Working Papers of the relevant Directorates and discussed in the sectoral review meetings.

#### **Agenda Item No.8**

##### Reviewing progress of implementation of ECO's approved programmes of action and projects and consideration of the new programmes and projects for the year 2006 in the following areas:

13. The sessions for sectoral preparatory/review meetings were presided over by the representatives of the countries as under:

- a) Trade and Investment by Mr. Mostafa Sarmadi, Director General of International Affairs and Specialized Organizations, Ministry of Commerce and the Head of National Committee of Trade, Islamic Republic of Iran.
- b) Transport and Communications by H.E. Mr. Sabit M. Tairov, Ambassador of the Republic of Kazakhstan to Tehran.
- c) Energy, Minerals & Environment by Mr. Lutfi Elvan, Deputy Undersecretary of the State Planning Organization (DPT) of the Republic of Turkey.

- d) Agriculture, Industry & Tourism by Mr. Reza Ashraf Semnani, Advisor to Deputy Minister, Ministry of Industries and Mines.
- e) Human Resources & Sustainable Development by Mr. Kanan Murtuzov, Second Secretary, Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Azerbaijan.
- f) Project and Economic Research & Statistics by H.E. Engineer Bareyalea Hassam, Deputy Minister of Communications of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan.
- g) Inter Regional ECO activities: (i) ECO Regional Institutions and Specialized Agencies (ii) International Relations by H.E. Ambassador Morteza Damanpak Jami, Head of ECO Bureau Affairs, Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Islamic Republic of Iran / ECO Permanent Representative.

14. The Council dwelt at length on the proposals, programmes/projects contained in the working papers of the Directorates of ECO Secretariat, including status reports on the ECO Calendar of Events/Meetings for 2005-2006, highlighting the progress made in the implementation of the activities approved by 15<sup>th</sup> COM meeting and formulated the recommendations in the following paragraphs proposing future course of action and activities in 2006 and 2007.

15. The Council noted with appreciation the work of the Secretariat with regard to implementation of the decisions/ recommendations of RPCs and other high level ECO organs and the ongoing Programme/Projects/Activities and Calendar of Events/Meetings for the year 2005 in all sectors. It also noted the steps taken by the Secretariat to implement the decisions of the 15<sup>th</sup> COM relating to the reorganization of the Secretariat.

**a) Trade and Investment**

16. The Council appreciated the task pursued by High Level Experts Group (HLEG) on Trade, Investment, and Other Related Matters in the ECO region for the finalization of the draft Protocol on Fast Track Approach to ECOTA. It further recommended the concerned countries (Iran, Pakistan and Turkey) to finalize the said Protocol within three months.

17. The Council expressed satisfaction on the approval and signature of the Protocol for annexes of ECOTA on: (i) ECO Rules of Origin; (ii) Anti-Dumping Measures; (iii) State Aid; and (iv) Intellectual Property Rights by the Contracting Parties to ECOTA during the Third ECO Ministerial Meeting on Commerce/Foreign Trade, which will now facilitate early operationalization of ECOTA. The Council requested the signatory member states (except Pakistan) to said Protocol to expedite its ratification process and particularly recommended the Republic of Tajikistan as the Contracting Party to ECOTA to sign and ratify it.

18. In view of the elucidations of the 3<sup>rd</sup> HLEG meeting on compilation of annexes of ECOTA, the Council urged the member states to provide their sensitive list (except Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan).

19. While welcoming the designation of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan as coordinating country for early realization/implementation of ECOTA, the Council requested the said coordinator and ECO Secretariat to make every effort to finalize the concerned Draft Plan of Action at the earliest. Other member states are encouraged to communicate their views on the Draft Plan of Action. The Council urged those member countries who have not ratified ECOTA to do so as soon as possible. The Council also requested the non-signatory member states to sign the Agreement.

20. The Council supported the recommendation of the 4<sup>th</sup> HLEG meeting to organize a Workshop on Potential Benefits of ECOTA to be organized by utilization of ECO-SSF in one of the Central Asian Countries, preferably in the Republic of Tajikistan, as a signatory country of ECOTA, subject to further confirmation by the Tajik authorities.

21. The Council urged the ECO Secretariat to expedite preparation of a multi-dimensional regional trade and investment strategy aiming to have a clear action plan and coherence in the trade and investment activities/programmes in the ECO region, which was also envisaged by the Istanbul Communiqué adopted during the 3<sup>rd</sup> Ministerial Meeting of Trade/Commerce. If it is necessitated, the Council recommended hiring a consultant through utilizing ECO Feasibility Fund. The Council further recommended to the ECO Secretariat in cooperation with the coordinating country for ECOTA, relevant HLEG and with the assistance of ITC and UNESCAP to make every effort in order to bring a draft framework of this strategy for the consideration of the 5<sup>th</sup> HLEG meeting.

22. The Council noted with satisfaction approval and signature of the Agreement on Promotion and Protection of Investment in the ECO region (APPI) during the third ECO Ministerial Meeting on Commerce/Foreign Trade. It urged the signatory member states to ratify and non-signatory member states to sign/ratify the Agreement for its implementation and promotion of trade and investment activities in the region. Meanwhile, the Council in view of the justification and *raison d'être* provided by the authorities of the Islamic Republic of Iran, regarding amendment of the second paragraph of item (7) – Article (9) of the said Agreement requested the member states to intimate their views/comments on the proposed substitution to the Secretariat at the earliest.

23. The Council welcomed the unconditional ratification of the Articles of Agreement of the ECO Trade and Development Bank by Islamic Republic of Iran and its subsequent coming into force as of August 3, 2005 as per Article 44 of the said Agreement. The Council appreciated the readiness of the Republic of Turkey to hold the First Meeting of the Board of Governors of ECO Trade & Development Bank in May 2006 in Turkey.

24. The Council appreciated the efforts made by the Secretariat in inviting the consultant firms from the member states to prepare Business Plan for establishment of ECO Trade and Development Bank, the application date of which was extended to 28 February, 2006.

25. The Council urged for early resolution of the pending issues on the draft Articles of Agreement through mutual exchange of views or Meeting of the Reinsurance Experts, which the Islamic Republic of Pakistan offered to host, to finalize the Draft Articles of Agreement for the Establishment of Reinsurance Company and to operationalize this important institution at the earliest.

26. While thanking the Islamic Republic of Pakistan for holding the First Ministerial Meeting on Finance/Economy, held on January 29-30, 2004 in Islamabad, the Council acknowledged the achievements made during the meeting. It urged the Central Banks of the Member States to share the information and experiences with each other. The Council also welcomed the offer of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan for hosting the First Meeting of the Heads of Central Banks.

27. The Council welcomed the establishment of High Level Experts Group (HLEG) comprising the senior officials (focal points) of the Ministries of Finance/Economy and regulatory agencies of the member states. The Council appreciated the offer of the Republic of Turkey to host the first meeting of HLEG on Finance/Economy.

28. The Council recognized that the involvement of private sector in trade and economic promotion activities would boost economic cooperation among the member states. It further emphasized that organization of Business Forum should be institutionalized as a mechanism for the improvement of relations between private sectors of the member states. The Council appreciated the offer of the Republic of Turkey to host the 2<sup>nd</sup> Business Forum in the framework of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Phase of ECO-ITC Joint Project on expanding intra-regional trade.

29. The Council welcomed the offer of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan to host the Fourth ECO Ministerial Meeting on Commerce/Foreign Trade preceded by 5<sup>th</sup> Meeting of HLEG on Trade, Investment and Other Related Matters to be held in Kabul in 2006 and requested the member states to participate in the said meetings with their active and concrete contribution. The offer for the said meeting will be reconfirmed through diplomatic channels soon.

30. The Council thanked the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan for holding the 10<sup>th</sup> Executive Committee Meeting of the ECO Chamber of Commerce and Industry (ECO-CCI) and urged the current Chairman of ECO-CCI to also convene the 8<sup>th</sup> General Assembly Meeting of ECO-CCI on sidelines of the 4<sup>th</sup> Ministerial Meeting on Commerce/Foreign Trade to finalize the statute, implementation of action plan of the ECO-CCI and decide about its location of permanent Secretariat. The offer for the said meeting will be reconfirmed through diplomatic channels soon.

31. The Council welcomed the Action Plan and supplementary time framework prepared by the Iranian Chamber of Commerce for the next ten years activities of the ECO-CCI and hoped for the early finalization and approval of the Action Plan and time framework by the 8<sup>th</sup> ECO-CCI General Assembly.

32. The Council welcomed the initiative of the ECO Secretariat for drafting Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) for cooperation with the ECO-CCI and the Islamic Chamber of Commerce & Industry (ICCI). It decided that in light of the inputs of the national chambers of the member states the signing of the said MOU could be realized.

33. The Council thanked the Republic of Azerbaijan for hosting the 4<sup>th</sup> meeting of the ECO Council of Heads of Customs Administration (CHCA), held on May 16-18, 2005 in Baku and noted with appreciation the finalization of the draft Agreement on establishment and operation of ECO Smuggling



and Customs Offences Data Bank. It also appreciated the approval of the said Agreement by 3<sup>rd</sup> Ministerial Meeting on Commerce and Foreign Trade held in the Republic of Turkey in July 2005. It urged upon other non-signatory member states to sign the agreement/become the party to the agreement and Republic of Turkey to initiate an action plan to implement the agreement soon.

34. The Council urged upon the Republic of Azerbaijan and Uzbekistan to provide details of the trainings to be offered to the customs officials of ECO member states as was agreed in the 4<sup>th</sup> CHCA Meeting and also called upon all the member states who have expertise in this field to arrange such training/orientation courses on regular basis for ensuring exchange of information and expertise.

35. The Council appreciated the setting up of the sub-committee of experts to consider/prioritize the recommendations of the UNDP Consultant Report on Simplification and Harmonization of customs rules and procedures of the ECO member states, and the Draft ECO Agreement on Mutual Administrative Assistance in Customs Matters as well as trade facilitation measures in the framework of WCO negotiations. It thanked the Republic of Turkey for her offer of hosting its 1<sup>st</sup> meeting and urged upon the member states to convey their views and comments on the agenda of the said meeting at the earliest.

36. The Council appreciated and thanked Islamic Republic of Iran as coordinating country for initiating the draft action plan on the simplification of visa procedure for the businessmen of ECO region and urged upon member states to cooperate with Iran and send their inputs/views to the Secretariat at the earliest enabling the coordinating country to start implementation of the project. The Islamic Republic of Iran will announce the dates for the 1<sup>st</sup> EGM composed of representatives of the Ministries of Foreign Affairs of the member states and ECO-CCI to revise the Agreement on Simplification of Visa Procedure for Businessmen of the ECO Member States after receiving their views and comments, if any, within 3 months.

37. The Council considered the vital importance of the exchange of trade related information among the ECO member states and urged the ECO member states to encourage e-commerce and extend their technical cooperation and assistance to the least developed ECO member states in building up their web-portals and accessibility to the ECO market through e-commerce and e-business.

38. The Council appreciated the efforts of ECO Secretariat in organizing the 3<sup>rd</sup> Seminar on Trade and Investment Information Networking in Pakistan and its achievements. The Council welcomed the proposal of the Islamic Republic of Iran to nominate an appropriate company to reactivate and technically supervise the convenient operation of the ECO web portal [www.tradeeco.org](http://www.tradeeco.org) with the utilization of ECO Feasibility Fund taking into account the recommendations of the International Trade Center.

39. RPC requested the member states to expedite submission of their data/information on trade values, trade figures on the major commodities actually traded in the region as well as their trade regime, rules and regulations and other relevant information for the improvement of ECO Trade-Net website. It also urged the member states to intimate name(s) including contact details of their updated national focal point(s) for this purpose.

40. The Council while welcoming the allocation of US\$ 50,000- from ECO Feasibility Study Fund (FSF) urged the ECO Secretariat to commence the 2<sup>nd</sup> Phase of the ECO\ITC project as soon as possible and approach ITC and other potential donors particularly to IDB in order to finalize and secure relevant financial requirements. It appreciated the pledges made by the Republic of Turkey for technical and financial support to the various activities identified within the said Project.

41. The Council thanked the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan for hosting the 3<sup>rd</sup> ECO Trade & Investment Conference, held in Kabul on 9-10 November 2005, and recommended the ECO Secretariat to follow-up its decisions/recommendation and participate as natural partner in the supplementary project for Sustainable Livelihoods and Private Sector Development in the region initiated by UNDP and other international/regional organizations.

42. The Council noted with satisfaction the ECO's growing relations with UNDP, UNCTAD, ITC, UNECE, UNESCAP, ADB, WB, IDB and ASEAN and other regional/international development organizations, institutions, and agencies to benefit from the experience and expertise of these organizations and to secure technical and financial support in ECO's important projects and programmes. The Council advised the Secretariat to initiate viable and sound projects with said institutions particularly with WTO for arranging joint workshops on global trade challenges of ECO countries and seeking technical and financial support.

43. With regard to the Calendar of Events pertaining to the Trade & Investment for the year 2006-2007, it was decided that if the dates of the meetings were not announced within three months after 16<sup>th</sup> Meeting of RPC, the Secretariat would inform the CPR to consider/review the Calendar of Events.

**b) Transport & Communications**

44. The Council while appreciating the member states for their endeavours to complete the infrastructure projects identified in the Programme of Action for the ECO Decade of Transport and Communications (1998-2007), emphasized on the need to receive updated information about the activities under taken by all the member states (except Iran and Turkey) to implement the said Programme. The Council also emphasized that since the year of 2007 is the ending time of completion of the Programme of Action for the ECO Decade of Transport and Communications, and there are still many infrastructure projects subject to completion, the member states should respond to several ECO Secretariat's notes requesting information on their latest activities in this regard so that the extension of the Programme could be decided in the upcoming Ministerial Meeting.

45. The Council while stressing on the issue of completion of construction of missing links in road and railway routes which was emphasized in the ECO Vision 2015 (Astana/October 1, 2005), appreciated the Islamic Republic of Iran for completing the important missing railway links of Mashad-Bafq in the year 2005. The Council also, while appreciating the Member States for taking necessary measures in this regards, requested the Islamic Republic of Iran, the Islamic Republic of Pakistan and the Republic of Turkey to send the latest information on the completion of the missing railway links such as Bam-Zahidan, rehabilitation of Taftan-Quetta and by-pass of Lake Van of the East-West transport corridor to the Secretariat. The delegations of the said three Member States briefed the Council on some of the activities done by them in this regard. The Turkish delegation informed the Council that necessary measures for completing the railway link around Lake Van are being taken adding that necessary financial resources have also been allocated in the budget and related investment programme of the year 2006 for construction of two new rail ferryboats in order to increase the existing transferring capacity in Lake Van for the rail traffic on East-West transport corridor.

46. While emphasizing on the importance of the issue of full operationalization of the container and passenger train projects which had been stressed in the ECO Vision 2015, the Council urged Afghanistan, Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan to nominate their members to the Working Group for implementation of Trans-Asian Railway line till the mid of March 2006. Moreover, the Council welcomed the Islamic Republic of Iran for its designation as coordinating country for the train project in the said route. With regard to nominating a coordinator country for the container train which was not finalized, the Council proposed that the issue be referred to the Council of Permanent Representatives (CPR) for making final decision. Upon the request of Turkish delegation, the Council asked the Secretariat to prepare a formal report on the current situation of the Istanbul-Almaty container train and submit the report to the next meeting of the Ministers of Transport to be held on 24-26 April 2006 in Tehran.

47. The Council also appreciated the Islamic Republic of Iran for accepting to be the host of the 1<sup>st</sup> Meeting of the Working Group for implementation of Trans-Asian Railway line which will be held after preparation of the analytical report on the draft agreement on Common Container Pool (CCP) by Kazakhstan.

48. Regarding the designation of the Islamic Republic of Iran as coordinator for the train project in Istanbul-Almaty route, the Council requested the member states except Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Turkey to introduce their focal points for necessary contacts and coordination and send their particulars to the Secretariat by the first week of March 2006.

49. The Council urged Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan to send their comments on the Draft Agreement on the Establishment and Operation of Common Containers Pool (CCP) for the Istanbul-Almaty container train prepared by Kazakhstan to the Secretariat within two months (i.e. 1<sup>st</sup> of April 2006). The Council also requested Kazakhstan to prepare the analytical report on the views of other member states on the said draft, for discussion in the first Working Group Meeting for implementation of Trans-Asia Railway main line by first week of May 2006.

50. The Council asked the member states except Pakistan and Turkey to convey their views to the Secretariat on the revised draft Action Plan for revitalizing and operating the China-Middle East-Europe-Corridor including a time framework for its execution prepared by the Iranian Railway authorities and distributed during the 8<sup>th</sup> meeting of ECO Heads of Railway Authorities (Istanbul/July 2004) by the end of March 2006.

51. The Council requested the member states to cooperate more closely to remove existing problems and impediments in the way of running passenger train particularly on issues such as high visa fee as well as the security issues. The Council agreed that the same issues may be included in the agenda of the working group for exploring solutions.

52. Considering the importance of the 9<sup>th</sup> Meeting of the Heads of ECO Railway Authorities the Kazakh delegation agreed to host the same meeting in May 2007 in Astana. However, due to a big gap between the 8<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> Meeting proposed by Kazakhstan, the participating delegations agreed that the Secretariat may consult with Kazakh authorities through CPR meetings to propose a closer date for the same meeting, if possible.

53. The Council took note of the provisions of the ECO Vision 2015 with regard to support initiatives towards development of projects in a framework of North-South, East-West, TRACECA and the Asian Highway Network transport corridors as well as Istanbul-Almaty container and passenger trains on the Trans-Asian Railway mainline. The delegation of the Republic of Azerbaijan proposed that in order to connect Azerbaijan's railway network to Turkish Railways, the railway line of Kars-Akhalkalaki-Tiflis-Baku be encouraged and supported by the Member States. The Turkish and Kazakh delegations supported this proposal. The Iranian delegation while welcoming all transport projects in the region, drew the attention of the meeting that all ECO projects should specifically be defined and approved in advance.

54. The Council requested Afghanistan and Turkmenistan to consider joining the Memorandum of Understanding on ECO Railway Tariff Policy in International Freight Traffic which was signed by other member states in the eve of the 8<sup>th</sup> Meeting of the Heads of ECO Railway Authorities and inform the Secretariat about the way they wish to sign the same. Furthermore, the Council requested the member states (except Azerbaijan and Turkey) to prepare their reports on the measures taken by them to implement the said MoU in their respective countries and send the same to the Secretariat by 10<sup>th</sup> March, 2006, considering that the said issue is also in the agenda of the Working Group's first meeting.

55. The Council appreciated the Iranian Railway authorities for taking final steps for publishing ECO railway map after receiving and considering comments/corrections of the member states.

56. The Turkish delegation requested the Member States to examine and send their views on the MoU on the facilitation and harmonization of the international road transport in the ECO region proposed by Turkey. The Secretariat explained that by operationalization of TTFA, most of the issues relating to transit transport in the ECO region included in Turkish draft MoU will be addressed. The Secretariat also agreed to once again follow up the Turkish proposal through the Member States.

57. The Council welcomed convening of Experts Group Meeting on ECO Road Network Map (Tehran/June 22-23, 2005) and requested the member states except Azerbaijan, Pakistan, Tajikistan, Turkey and Uzbekistan to send their national road maps on the basis of the Road Standards of UNESCAP and other standards which were explained in the above mentioned meeting along with their corrections to the ECO Secretariat by the end of February 2006 to be forwarded to the Iranian relevant authorities for publishing the new version of the ECO Road Network Map the draft of which will be forwarded to the Member States for their final approval.

58. The Council appreciated the Iranian Central Insurance authorities for holding the first Meeting of ECO Insurance Experts' Group (Tehran, September 6-7, 2005) and asked the member states to send to the Secretariat their comments/views on the Draft Agreement on ECO Interim Motor Vehicle Third Party Liability Insurance Scheme prepared by the Bimeh Markazi Iran (Central Insurance of Iran), and already distributed among the member states, by 10<sup>th</sup> May 2006. The Iranian delegation informed the Council that Bemeh Markazi Iran (Central Insurance of Iran) accepts to hold the 2<sup>nd</sup> meeting of ECO Insurance Experts' Group in 2006 and the exact date will be proposed through diplomatic channels.

59. Moreover, the Council asked the Turkish authorities to prepare the draft Directory on ECO Road Network after publication of the ECO Road Network Map and asked the member states (except Iran and Pakistan) to provide the Turkish authorities with the necessary information incorporated in the questionnaire prepared by Turkish authorities.

60. The Council welcomed holding the Second Meeting of the ECO Heads of Reference Marine Organizations (Turkey/November 17-18, 2005) as a new progressive field of cooperation in the region and requested the member states to convey to the Secretariat their views on the Memorandum of Understanding on Maritime Search and Rescue prepared by Iran. The Council also requested Iran to formulate the terms of reference for establishment of Working Group to work on the tariff structure of marine transportation, while requesting the same country as well as Azerbaijan, Pakistan and Turkey to convey to the Secretariat the details of their training facilities and courses in maritime field. The Council



also requested Turkey to forward the format for creating a web page for collection of necessary information on maritime affairs which would be linked to the ECO web site. The Council also appreciated the offer by Pakistan to hold the 3<sup>rd</sup> meeting of Heads of Reference of the Marine Organization of the ECO Member States in Pakistan in 2006 and asked the Pakistani authorities to send the fixed date of the said meeting to the Secretariat.

61. With regard to the Draft Framework Agreement on Cooperation in the field of Air Transport provided by Kazakhstan, the Turkish delegation while reiterating its full support to such initiatives stated that the issue would be reconsidered by the relevant Turkish authorities.

62. The Council appreciated the Islamic Republic of Iran for expressing its readiness to host the 5<sup>th</sup> Trans-Asia-Europe Fiber Optical Cable System (TAEFOS) Meeting in May 2006 and requested the member states (except Iran and Turkey) to fill the Proforma prepared by Kazakhstan on Transit Prices of TAEFOS Parties and send it to Kazakh authorities as well as to the Secretariat at the earliest.

63. The Council requested the member states to make their tariff policies on TAEFOS more rational and suggested those member states which have not connected to TAEFOS network yet, to do so.

64. The Council requested Afghanistan, Iran and Pakistan to increase their efforts for joining of Afghanistan and Pakistan to the TAEFOS network already exists in the region.

65. The Council emphasized on the importance of holding the 14<sup>th</sup> Meeting of Directors General of National Telecommunications Companies of the ECO member states and asked the member states to actively participate in the said Meeting which will be held in Tehran in May 2006.

66. The Council appreciated efforts made by postal authorities of the member states to implement the decisions of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Meeting of the ECO Postal Authorities (November 7-8, 2005) and requested them to make necessary arrangements for implementing the remaining issues. The Council also appreciated the Republic of Turkey for accepting to be the host of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Meeting of the ECO Postal Authorities on in September 20-22, 2006 in Istanbul, and asked the member states to actively participate in the said meeting when held. The Turkish delegation requested the Member States to consider joining the Euro-Asia Postal Union founded by Turkey, Azerbaijan and Pakistan.

67. The Council noted with satisfaction the new web site designed by the Iranian postal authorities linked to the ECO web site as a good step for implementation of the decisions of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Meeting of the ECO Postal Authorities. The especial users name and passwords for each member state have already been provided and circulated among the member states to let them insert necessary information on their postal products and technologies into the said web site.

68. The Council took note of the long delay on identifying a permanent training centre for ECO postal trainees due to difficulties in scheduling arrangements for first visit of the surveying team and asked Pakistani authorities to fix a new date for visiting of the said team to its postal training centre. The Council urged the member states to take part in the proposed visit. The delegation of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan expressed its readiness to arrange the said visit on the date proposed by the ECO Secretariat. The representative of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan expressed his readiness to arrange the date proposed by the ECO Secretariat. He pointed out that the proposed visit has been postponed on two occasions due to the lack of interest by the Member States and asked the Member States to actively participate in the said visit when the date will be announced by Pakistan.

69. The Council noted with satisfaction the ratification of Transit Transport Framework Agreement (TTFA) by Afghanistan which completed the procedure for entering into force of the same Agreement and welcomed operationalization of the Agreement from May 2006 which was considered in the ECO Vision 2015. However the Council requested those member states which had not signed or ratified TTFA to do so as soon as possible.

70. The Council also asked Afghanistan and Kazakhstan to introduce their nominees for Transit Transport Coordination Council (TTCC) by mid of May 2006. The Council also appreciated the Republic of Azerbaijan for accepting coordination of implementation of TTFA which is a further step towards the implementation of the said Agreement as it was emphasized by EPG. The Turkish delegation suggested that TTCC, when established, may have a thorough review on the contents and provisions of TTFA and after receiving proposals and comments from all the Member States make any amendments and additions, if needed.

71. The Council urged the member states to complete the requisite formalities at the national level necessary for accession to the remaining international conventions listed in the Programme of Action for ECO Decade of Transport and Communications at the earliest and asked them (except

Azerbaijan, Iran, Pakistan, Tajikistan and Turkey) to send their reports on the said issue to the Secretariat at the earliest.

72. The Council requested the member states to actively participate in the 1<sup>st</sup> Expert's Meeting of Information and Communications Technologies (ICT) which is scheduled to be held in Tehran in May 2006.

73. The Council requested the member states (except Azerbaijan, Iran and Turkey) to send their reports on the activities undertaken by them with regard to harmonization of their existing railway information systems and upgrading them by using internet in order to make the necessary information accessible to all ECO member states.

74. Regarding the second phase of Multimodal Transportation Project (MMT) in the ECO region the Council requested Afghanistan, Azerbaijan, Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan which had already introduced their national consultants for the project to convey their country reports to the Secretariat by the end of February 2006. The Council also requested Tajikistan and Turkmenistan as the only member states which have not introduced their national consultants yet, to do so and to send their country reports accordingly at the earliest.

75. The Council reaffirmed the realization of the goals and objectives set forth in the Almaty Declaration and Programme of Action adopted by the UN Conference of Ministers of Transportation of the landlocked countries in 2003 and approved by the UN General Assembly in its 58th session in 2004 which was emphasized by the ECO Vision 2015.

76. The Secretariat briefed the meeting about a note verbale bearing No.PR/AFG/2005/1860 dated October 12, 2005, asking the Member States to introduce projects for feasibility studies on Transport & Communications and informed that the Iranian authorities had just sent their proposal on the same subject for inclusion in the agenda of the 108<sup>th</sup> CPR. The Secretariat asked the other Member States to send their proposed feasibility projects for consideration by the Secretariat as well as the other Member States.

### **c) Energy, Minerals & Environment**

#### **Energy**

77. The 15<sup>th</sup> meeting of COM in its "ECO Vision 2015" adopted as Basic Reference Document of ECO, among the other issues, resolved to establish interconnection and parallel functioning of electric power systems in the ECO region by the year 2015, exchange and trade of electricity; to enhance utilization of renewable and alternative sources of energy, increase energy production and efficiency, establish intra-regional energy market, boost cooperation in promoting investments to energy sector and promote human resources, exchange of the sector-related technological information and experience.

78. In this regard the Council took note that the Secretariat has started work on the preparation of the draft Plan of Action for Energy/Petroleum Cooperation in the ECO region for a new 5 year period (2006-2010) in the consultation with all member states to be put on for the approval of the relevant ECO organ. The Council also appreciated the proposal/views/comments received from Islamic Republic of Iran, Kyrgyz Republic and Republic of Turkey. The Council emphasized the need of speeding up the submission of views/proposals by the other member states in order to finalize the drafting of the said Plan of Action by ECO Secretariat to be agreed upon by all member states before its approval.

79. With reference to para 71 of the 15<sup>th</sup> RPC meeting report, the Council was informed that the Contract on the Consultancy Services, to be performed within the feasibility study on Interconnection of ECO Countries Power Systems, was negotiated and signed by the ECO Secretariat and selected Consultant, in coordination with CPR and the Islamic Development Bank, and the work on the subject feasibility study was commenced as of August 25, 2005, after the first disbursement to the Consultant had been made.

80. While taking note of this new development, the Council requested the concerned authorities in the member states to finalize the process of collection and submission of the requested data for the above said study to the Consultant, on the urgent basis, in order to ensure the process of implementation of the study, as scheduled. The Council requested the member states which have not appointed their focal points

to coordinate and facilitate the work on the said feasibility study (Afghanistan, Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan) to do so at the earliest. While the National Focal Points for the Study are urged to extend full cooperation for the implementation of the Study, the Consultant may be requested to visit some member states as required for collection of data and consider convening of technical workshops to review the work being done on the Study with invitation of concerned experts from the member states.

81. The Council took note that the second course of the EIE-JICA International Third Country Training Program on Practical Training Courses for Energy Managers of Industry (related to the energy conservation and efficiency) was successfully conducted in Ankara, Turkey, on 13-24 June 2005 with the participation of nine delegates from the ECO member states. The Council appreciated the readiness of the concerned Turkish authorities to organize the third course of that Training Program in June 2006, and considered this activity as the continuation of the similar training events arranged by them in the years 2002-2004.

82. With reference to para 73 of the 15<sup>th</sup> RPC meeting report, the Council endorsed the Report of the Workshop on Regional Energy Trade in the ECO region, which was prepared and convened with the cooperation and financing of World Bank on 29-30 June 2005, in Tehran, at the ECO Secretariat premises with the participation of the representatives of WB, ADB, IDB and UNESCAP and advised to follow up its recommendations.

83. Being acquaint with the recent development in this field, the Council appreciated the cooperation and support of the World Bank, which had recently received US\$100,000 from ESMAP to fund the first step of analytical work, and arranged for possibility to get additional fund to initiate the other studies as recommended by the above said Workshop. The Council requested the Secretariat to continue its cooperation with the World Bank and other donors on pursuing the regional energy trade issues, including further analytical work, etc., and the member states to extend their cooperation.

84. The Council took note of the WB intention to complete the above first study within the next 6 months and discuss it in another Workshop with ECO in June/July 2006, and supported this endeavour. In view of this activity, the establishment of the ECO/WB Advisory Working Group (AWG) on Regional Energy Trade, which would participate in designing and guiding the analytical work, discussing its findings, etc., as recommended by the World Bank, was welcomed. In this respect, the Council invited the member states to nominate their concerned officials as members of this Group, at the earliest possible, and inform the Secretariat on their contact details, accordingly.

85. The Council took note of the Report of the 4<sup>th</sup> High Level Experts Task Group (4<sup>th</sup> HLETG) meeting on ECO Oil and Gas Pipeline route(s) held at Ceyhan Terminal of BOTAS, Turkey, on 5-6 May 2005 and Proceeding of the related Workshop, which was held at the same venue on 4 May 2005. Taking into account that Afghanistan, Kyrgyzstan and Turkey have already submitted information on their Oil and Gas sectors on the agreed format, for placing it in the ECO Web-site, as it was recommended by the 4<sup>th</sup> HLETG meeting, the Council urged the other member states to do the same, at the earliest.

86. The Council was informed that the Secretariat, circulated among the member states its project proposal for a study on the "Development of ECO countries manufacturing capabilities of the equipment used for New and Renewable Energies", in order to receive their views and comments before submission it for CPR's consideration. Since, only comments of Turkey were received in this regard, the Council recommended the Secretariat to continue its consultation with the member states, to finalize the matter and urged the concerned authorities of the member states to expedite provision of their views/comments. It was also noted that the Secretariat has sent a letter to UN Commission on Sustainable Development/Department of Economic and Social Affairs (DESA) with the enclosed afore mentioned project, to seek their assistance.

## **Minerals**

87. The Council, being informed of the work on the compilation and publication of the first version of the ECO Mineral Data Booklet (MDB), requested the Project Manager (Turkey) to publish it, with inclusion of the data of the member states submitted in accordance with the agreed format, and forward sufficient number of copies of this publication to the Secretariat for circulation among the member states.

88. Since the Secretariat received several proposals/views of the member states regarding the format for compilation of Metallogenic Map of ECO region, and there are other technical issues to be

considered on the expert level, the Council reiterated its recommendation to consider them at the 3<sup>rd</sup> ECO Mineral Experts Group meeting. In this respect the Council welcomed the readiness of Pakistan to host the above said event during the year 2006.

89. The Council appreciated the proposals of the Islamic Republic of Iran with regard to:

- (i) establishment of “an online dynamic and multipurpose ECO Mineral Data Bank” for which utilization of ECO Feasibility Study Fund may be explored;
- (ii) preparing the “Mineral Distribution Map of the ECO region” for which necessary format for relevant data collection designed by Islamic Republic of Iran would be submitted to ECO Secretariat within two months; and
- (iii) establishment of a web-based system of unified and valid “Geosciences Database” accessible to member states for which the concerned authorities of the Islamic Republic of Iran would prepare the project proposal within 3 months for consideration of the member states and discussion at the 3<sup>rd</sup> ECO Mineral Experts Group meeting.

### **Environment**

90. The Council took note that the 15<sup>th</sup> COM meeting endorsed the outcomes of the Second ECO Ministerial meeting on Environment held in 2004 in Istanbul, including the amended text of the Plan of Action for Cooperation among ECO member states on Environment (2003-2007) and requested the member states to take necessary measures to implement the decisions of this meeting. The Council welcomed the offer of the Republic of Kazakhstan to host the third ECO Ministerial Meeting on Environment in Almaty, in May/June 2006 and invited the member states to confirm their participation, at the earliest possible.

91. The Council endorsed the Report of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Meeting of the ECO Working Group on Environment (WGE) held in Islamabad, Pakistan on 23-24 February 2005, and stressed the importance of the convening of that WGE meetings, focused of the implementation of the above said Plan of Action and consideration of the new proposals of the member states on enhancing the regional cooperation in the field of Environment, regularly. In this connection, the Council appreciated the willingness of the Islamic Republic of Iran to host the next meeting of WGE.

92. With regard to the Iranian project proposals for the cooperation in the field of Environment, which had been made available to the member states and also attached to the working papers of this RPC meeting, the Council took note of the comments received from Pakistan and Tajikistan, in this respect. In order to arrange the detailed consideration of these project proposals at the nearest meeting of WGE, the Council urged the other member states to forward to the Secretariat their views/proposals on the said project proposals.

93. The Council endorsed the outcomes of the ECO Experts Meeting on Environmental Impact Assessment held in Ankara, Turkey on 20-21 September 2005, and recommended this topic to be included in the future working plans in this subject area.

94. The Council took note on the Workshop-Training Course on “PRECIS-Regional Climate Model” which was conducted successfully by the concerned Turkish authorities in coordination with the ECO Secretariat during 5-9 September 2005 in Alanya, Turkey, under the auspice of the Regional Meteorological Training Center of the World Meteorological Organization (WMO). Taking into account that during that Training Course the practical applications as well as theoretical lectures on the subject topic were given to the participants from the ECO member states, the Council requested the Secretariat to expand the cooperation with WMO and other international organizations, for obtaining their support and assistance.

95. The Council appreciated the efforts of the ECO Secretariat regarding the preparation and publication during the year 2005 of the first, second and third issues of the ECO Quarterly Bulletin on Environment, which are also available on the ECO Website. While appreciating the submission of materials/articles for this Bulletin by some member states and reiteration of the support to the ECO Secretariat in this respect by the Islamic Republic of Iran, the Council requested the concerned authorities of all member states to take active part in the process of preparation of its next issues by submission of their relevant materials to the Secretariat, regularly.

96. Having noted that seven member states, namely the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan, Republic of Azerbaijan, Islamic Republic of Iran, Kyrgyz Republic, Islamic Republic of Pakistan, Republic of Tajikistan, and Republic of Turkey provided the Secretariat with their National Progress Reports on the Implementation of the Plan of Action for cooperation among ECO member states on Environment (2003-2007) for year 2004, and that only Turkey have submitted their National Progress Report for 2005, the Council called upon the Member States which have not submitted their subject National Progress Reports for 2004 and 2005, to do so at the earliest. The further submission of that report should be twice a year, as it had been agreed by the member states.

97. The Council was informed of the establishment of a Task Force with the participation of the representatives of the three member states namely Iran, Pakistan and Turkey to carry out consultations /preparatory works in collaboration with the ECO Secretariat on establishing ECO College on Environment, and that the first and second meeting of that Task Force were held in 2005 in Iran and Pakistan, respectively. The Council noted that after the finalizing the subject matter at the third meeting of the Task Force, which is expected to be held in Turkey, in the second half of February 2006, their recommendations could be submitted for consideration of the member states, next Ministerial Meeting on Environment and ECO decision making bodies.

98. The Council welcomed the readiness of the concerned authorities of the Republic of Turkey to host a Seminar on Ecotourism in 2006 in Ankara and conduct the "Watershed Rehabilitation" Workshop/Seminar in May/June 2006, in Malatya, and requested the member states to take active part at these events.

99. The Council appreciated offers of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan and Islamic Republic of Iran which announced their willingness to host the Experts' Meeting on developing the Work Plan on Biodiversity and Training Course on the Familiarization with the ISO 14000 Environment Management system, respectively.

#### **d) Agriculture, Industry and Tourism**

##### **Agriculture**

100. The Council appreciated the successful completion of the ECO Regional Programme for Food Security (ECO-RPFS) along with strategy documents i.e. Regional Strategy for Agricultural Development and Food Security for the ECO Member Countries, and a Sub-Regional Strategy for Central Asian Countries (including Azerbaijan) which are based on two major components, namely increasing food production capacities at national level and facilitation of agro - trade within and outside of ECO region. The Council expressed its thanks to FAO Headquarters and its Near East Office for their generous contributions in the preparation of ECO RPFS which contains several regional and national projects requiring strong follow-up on the part of member countries, ECO Secretariat on the one side and FAO for securing financing on the other.

101. The Council requested the member states to actively contribute to the implementation of the programme. In this respect, the Council requested the ECO Secretariat and FAO in cooperation with relevant member countries to endeavor for funding the projects. The Council also requested the ECO Secretariat to consult the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Affairs of the Republic of Turkey to consider hosting the Donors' Conference in second half of 2006 in collaboration with IDB, FAO and ECO Secretariat. The Council requested the Secretariat to contact with all possible donors including EU for their active participation in the Conference and endeavor to ensure strong involvement of the governments in the process.



102. The Council also welcomed the idea of organizing Business Forum of private sector on Agri-Business in Dubai for introducing project ideas and proposals to private sector. The Council requested member countries to prepare proposals for private sector in their respective countries, particularly in packaging, storing, food processing, water management, drought management, seed industry, biotechnology, livestock development and trade promotion.

103. The Council expressed its thanks and appreciation to IDB for its kind and generous offer to finance 10 Technical Assistance Projects (TAs) for national projects (1 project for each ECO member state amounting to 200,000-300,000 USD per project) and agreeing to finance four training workshops (approximately 20,000 USD for each workshop) i.e. "Competitiveness, Trade and WTO" to be held in Antalya, Turkey in March-May, 2006; "Sustainable Agricultural Development" to be held in May 2006 in Tehran, Iran; "Workshop on Water Demand Management for Agriculture" to be held in Pakistan in 2007; and "Livestock Development" scheduled to be held in Kyrgyz Republic in 2007.

104. Regarding above mentioned national projects under RPFS, the Council requested the member states to expedite the procedures for formal application to FAO within six weeks time and completion of the procedures for ensuring funding from IDB at the earliest.

105. The Council welcomed the idea of joint FAO/ IDB / ECO Meeting for bringing the food security as top agenda item of the forthcoming 9<sup>th</sup> ECO Summit to strengthen political will and commitment at the highest level for supporting food security endeavors in the region. The Council supported the idea for holding an event on food security on the sidelines of the 9<sup>th</sup> ECO Summit and inviting the executive chiefs of the relevant international organizations such as FAO, IDB to participate in the event and deliver statements on the issue during the Summit. The Council also recommended the member states to promote among themselves South-South Cooperation within the framework of the FAO Special Programmes for Food Security and Regional Programmes for Food Security.

106. The Council appreciated that preparations for FAO/ECO Technical Cooperation Programme (TCP) amounting to US\$ 350,000 for strengthening the seed supply in the ECO region with a particular emphasis on Central Asia had been finalized and the TCP would be signed within 1-2 months. The Council expressed its thanks to FAO (Plant and Seed Genetic Resources Services) for assisting the ECO in this regard.

107. With regard to the 1<sup>st</sup> Meeting of National Focal Points on ECO-FAO TCP Project on Seed Supply in the ECO Region, the Islamic Republic of Iran offered to host it in the year 2006, while the Republic of Uzbekistan is also considering to host this event. The issue of the venue will be finalized by 10<sup>th</sup> of April, 2006.

108. The Council welcomed the offer of the Islamic Republic of Iran to be the focal point on seed technology transfer. The Council agreed to establish a seed technical committee comprising the representatives of the member states to supervise ECO activities in the field of seed related matters and among others to give guidelines for implementation of the TCP and to consider its outcomes.

109. The Council, considering the organization of various events, conferences, workshops under the ECO-FAO TCP for strengthening the seed supply in the ECO region, agreed that there will be not more than one event to be held in any country to be organized under TCP.

110. The Islamic Republic of Iran announced its readiness to extend technical assistance to the member states and to host regional workshops and training courses on seed related issues with the contributions of international/regional organizations like International Union of Protection and New Plant Varieties (UPOV), OECD, ISTA, FAO, ICARDA and UPSA.

111. The Council noted with appreciation that ECO CPR has already allocated 35,000- 40,000 USD for the seed project and FAO and ECO Secretariat had already initiated actions for successful implementation of the said TCP. The Council requested the Member States (except Islamic Republic of Iran, Islamic Republic of Pakistan and Republic of Turkey) to nominate Focal Points on Seed Project in order to facilitate implementation of the project.

112. The Council supported, in principle, the utilization of ECO Feasibility Fund for three projects in the fields of drought management: establishment of Regional Center for Risk Management of Natural Disasters, prevention of post harvest crop losses and water demand management for agriculture, being priority areas for ECO agricultural cooperation. In this regard, the Council requested the ECO Council of Permanent Representatives (CPR) to consider positively the allocation of 50,000 USD for each project from Feasibility Fund in a way to start regional programmes / projects in these areas. The Council requested the Islamic Republic of Pakistan and Republic of Turkey to send regional projects proposals /

documents in the fields of water management and prevention of post harvest crop losses respectively within six weeks.

113. The Council welcomed the offer of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan for hosting the Workshop on Water Management on 16-22 July 2006 in Islamabad. The Council also requested the Republic of Turkey to convey the exact dates and other details for holding the Workshop on prevention of crop losses (cereal and pulses) at post harvest stages. The Council requested the Secretariat to continue its consultations with FAO for benefiting from their technical assistance (trainers, training material) in the proposed workshops.

114. The Council appreciated the efforts made by the concerned authorities of the Islamic Republic of Iran for establishment of Regional Center for Risk Management of Natural Disasters (ECO – RCRMOND) at the Iranian National Meteorological Center in Mashad noting that the Center would be inaugurated during the 1<sup>st</sup> Meeting of the ECO Heads of Meteorological Organizations in May, 2006. The Council requested the Member States to actively participate in the activities of the Center which will play a key role in drought management and mitigation in the region. The Council also welcomed the proposals of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan and Islamic Republic of Pakistan for establishment of sub-centers in the countries and requested the member states to conduct further consultations on modalities for the establishment of the sub-centers through communications and during the First Meeting of ECO Heads of Meteorological Organizations scheduled to be held in Tehran. The Council requested the Member States to expedite nomination of the national focal points on drought management and mitigation.

115. The Council requested the Secretariat to approach World Meteorological Organization (WMO) with reference to the Memorandum of Understanding between ECO-WMO for effective involvement and contribution of WMO in the ECO activities in the field of drought mitigation and management.

116. Keeping in view the importance of agro-trade promotion the Council requested the member states (except Islamic Republic of Pakistan) to send their country reports/data relating to agro-trade to the ECO Secretariat.

117. The Council reiterated the importance of the World Trade Organization (WTO) Agreements on agriculture and phyto-sanitary issues and the needs of member states for capacity enhancement in the relevant departments. The Council welcomed the offer of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan and Republic of Turkey to organize training courses/workshops on WTO Agreements on Agriculture. The Council also welcomed the offer of the Islamic Republic of Iran for hosting the workshop on sanitary and phyto-sanitary matters with the assistance of international donors.

118. Recalling the decisions of the 1<sup>st</sup> SOM on Agriculture and the 2<sup>nd</sup> Ministerial Meeting on Agriculture, the Council requested the Islamic Republic of Iran as coordinator country for livestock development and health, to start the necessary initiatives for carrying out a comprehensive survey on the situation of livestock sector in the region which will lead to preparation of the ECO sub-sectoral strategy for livestock sector. This survey will serve for the first phase of the ECO Regional Programme for combating trans-boundary animal diseases within Regional Programme for Food Security (RPFS). The regional headquarters/headquarters of the coordinating committee of the programme will be established in Tehran. The Council requested the Secretariat, upon receipt of the outline of the study, to approach FAO and other relevant international organizations for their technical and financial support to the above-mentioned study.

119. The Council also appreciated the efforts of Islamic Republic of Iran for preparation of the draft document of Association of ECO Permanent Commission for Prevention and Control of Animal Diseases (and Animal Origin Food Borne Diseases) (ECO-PCPCAD) and requested the member states to send their inputs/views in this regard to the Secretariat. The draft document would be submitted to the First Meeting of the ECO Heads of Veterinary Organizations scheduled to be held in Tehran in April/June, 2006.

120. The Council noted with appreciation that ECO had allocated 50,000 USD for the establishment of ECO Agricultural Biotechnology Network (ECO-ABN) and that the 1<sup>st</sup> Expert Group Meeting (EGM) on ECO Agricultural Biotechnology Network (ECO-ABN) would be hosted by the Islamic Republic of Iran on 22-24 April, 2006 in Tehran. The Council requested the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan, Republic of Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan to nominate National Focal Points on ECO-ABN as the participation of National Focal Points in the EGM is important for launching the Network and its efficient implementation.

121. The Council appreciated the offers of the Republic of Azerbaijan and the Islamic Republic of Iran for hosting the Expert Group Meeting (EGM) to study the modalities of the establishment of an International Cotton Association (Forum). The Council also proposed that CPR may consider the issue

with a view to allocate some amount of money from ECO Feasibility Fund for that purpose. The Council requested the member states, except the Islamic Republic of Pakistan, Republic of Tajikistan and Republic of Turkey to send their views/comments on the proposal of the Republic of Azerbaijan for the establishment of the above mentioned Association (Forum).

122. The Council appreciated the offers of the member states for hosting several events as indicated in the Calendar of events and requested all member countries to actively participate in these events.

123. The Council emphasized the Secretariat to continue its endeavors for establishing working relationship with relevant international organizations FAO, IDB EU, OIE, ADB etc.

124. The Council appreciated the announcement of the Islamic Republic of Iran for hosting the 3<sup>rd</sup> ECO Ministerial Meeting on Agriculture in Tehran in the last quarter of 2006. The Ministerial Meeting will, inter alia, consider and approve the ECO Regional Strategy on Food Security, Sub-regional strategy for Central Asia (including Azerbaijan) and ECO Regional Programme for Food Security and Agricultural Development.

### **Industry**

125. The Council took note with appreciation the adoption of Istanbul Declaration and decisions made by the 2<sup>nd</sup> ECO Ministerial Meeting on Industry in Istanbul on November 25, 2006. The Council emphasized on implementation of the decisions of the Ministerial Meeting.

126. The Council noted with satisfaction the progress on preparation of ECO Regional Strategy on Industry Cooperation and sub-sectoral strategies. The Council welcomed the establishment of Steering Committee, comprising of the Islamic Republic of Iran, Islamic Republic of Pakistan and Republic of Turkey and other countries willing to join, for finalization of the strategy documents. The Council appreciated the offer of the Islamic Republic of Iran for hosting the Steering Committee Meeting in the second half of June, 2006. The Council requested the Member States to convey their willingness to join the Steering Committee. The Council also expressed its thanks to all member countries especially the Islamic Republic of Pakistan for their contributions in drafting the ECO Regional Industrial Cooperation Strategy and Islamic Republic of Iran and Republic of Turkey their contributions in ECO sub-sectoral strategy and model.

127. The Council also appreciated the preparation and submission of various project proposals by the Islamic Republic of Iran and Islamic Republic of Pakistan during the 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> Experts Group Meetings, 1<sup>st</sup> High Level Experts Group Meeting and Senior Officials' Meeting on Industry and requested member states to convey their other proposals by June, 2006 in the field of industry. The Council requested that some selected projects be submitted to IDB and other relevant financing institutions by proposing member countries through ECO Secretariat or directly.

128. The Council requested the Member States to send their inputs, National Industrial Strategy documents etc. for preparation of ECO Regional Industrial Strategy in line with the industrial policies of the Member States.

129. The Meeting supported the recommendation of the 1<sup>st</sup> HLEG on Industry to utilize the ECO Feasibility Fund for studying on selective priority basis the sub-sectors chosen by the 1<sup>st</sup> EGM for preparation of the strategy held in Ankara in September 2004 in the light of priorities determined by the 1<sup>st</sup> Ministerial Meeting on Industry held in Tehran in January 2004 with a view to prepare sub-sectoral strategies in these areas.

130. The Meeting appreciated the offer of the Islamic Republic of Iran for hosting the 2<sup>nd</sup> HLEG Meeting in Tehran scheduled to be held in August 2006 and requested the member states to actively participate in the meeting

131. The Council noted with satisfaction the adoption/approval of Plan of Action on Privatization by the 2<sup>nd</sup> ECO Ministerial Meeting on Industry (Istanbul: November 2005). The Council emphasized on implementation of the Plan of Action through implementation mechanism mentioned in the said document.

132. The Meeting appreciated the offer of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan for hosting the Second Meeting of the ECO Heads of Privatization Administration and 1<sup>st</sup> Meeting of HLEG on Privatization and Private Sector Development in April 2006 in Islamabad.

133. The Council appreciated preparation of Draft Plan of Action for ECO Cooperation in the field of Entrepreneurship and SMEs Development. The Council requested the member states to convey their willingness for holding the Experts Group Meeting (EGM) on SMEs which would consider and finalize the Draft Plan of Action. The Council requested the Member States to send their proposals/views on the Draft

Plan of Action which was circulated among the Member States along with the Report of the Senior Officials Meeting (SOM) on Industry. The Council also appreciated the offer of the Islamic Republic of Iran for hosting the ECO Workshop on Venture Capital Systems in the last week of May, 2006 in Tehran.

134. The Meeting appreciated the offer of the Islamic Republic of Iran on organization of ECO Roundtable/Regional Conference on Industrial Investment Projects in 2006-2007 in line with the preparation of the projects for submission to the international/regional financial institutions.

135. The Council appreciated the efforts of the Member States to enhance regional cooperation in the vital areas of standardization, conformity assessment, accreditation and metrology and the endeavors made by the coordinator countries and institutions; the Islamic Republic of Iran and the Republic of Turkey and their respective National Standards Bodies ISIRI and TSE; with regard to the implementation of the decisions/recommendations stated in the paragraphs 120 and 121 of the report of 15<sup>th</sup> Meeting of RPC.

136. The Council noted with satisfaction the progress made on the establishment of institutionalized cooperation among the Member States in the fields of standardization, conformity assessment, accreditation and metrology and the approval of Draft Statute of ECO Regional Institute for Standardization, Conformity Assessment, Accreditation and Metrology (RISCAM) and the adoption of ECO Cooperation Strategy on Standardization, Conformity Assessment, Accreditation and Metrology by the 1<sup>st</sup> Meeting of ECO Heads of Standardization Organizations and Other Related Bodies (Tehran: 17 January 2006). The Council stressed upon efficient implementation of the strategy through implementation mechanism mentioned in the said strategy document.

137. The Council noted that the RISCAM can play an important role in enhancing inter-regional and intra-regional trade through harmonization of standards as well as conformity assessment, accreditation and metrology practices within ECO region. The Council referred the Draft Statute of RISCAM to the forthcoming meeting of the ECO Council of Ministers (COM) for approval. The COM will also make appropriate decision with regard to the issue for hosting the Headquarters of the RISCAM (Article 2 of the Draft Statute).

138. The Republic of Turkey proposed to add a new article in the Draft Statute of the RISCAM as follows: "The provisions of this Statute and its related protocols and annexes shall not be interpreted as implying in anyway a change in the rights and obligations of a Member State under any existing international treaty." The Council agreed that this issue will be discussed during the forthcoming COM.

139. The Council welcomed the offers made by the Islamic Republic of Iran and the Republic of Turkey in the 1<sup>st</sup> Meeting of ECO Heads of Standardization Organizations and Other Related Bodies to host the 2<sup>nd</sup> Meeting after the endorsement of the Draft Statute of RISCAM by the ECO Council of Ministers (COM). In this regard the coordinating countries and the ECO Secretariat will make consultations and will decide about the exact date and venue of the meeting. Any other Member State volunteering to host the 3<sup>rd</sup> EGM on Standardization, Conformity Assessment, Accreditation and Metrology and the 2<sup>nd</sup> Meeting of ECO Heads of Standardization Organizations and Other Related Bodies shall communicate its willingness to the ECO Secretariat by the end of July 2006.

140. The Council appreciated the proposal of the Islamic Republic of Iran for establishment of ECO Technology Transfer Center/Website. The Council appreciated the offer of the Islamic Republic of Iran, as coordinating country, for hosting the 1<sup>st</sup> EGM on Transfer of Technology in May, 2006 in Tehran. Recalling the decisions made by SOM in Istanbul in November 2005 there will be some project proposals by the Iranian side during the EGM. The Council requested the Member States (except Republic of Azerbaijan, Islamic Republic of Iran, Islamic Republic of Pakistan and Republic of Turkey) to nominate Focal Points on Technology Transfer and Management. The Council appreciated the operationalization of the website designed by the Islamic Republic of Iran at [www.ettcenter.com](http://www.ettcenter.com)

141. Taking into consideration the significant role of regional cooperation for Industrial Property Rights (IPR) and preparation of Draft Plan of Action on IPR by Republic of Turkey which later considered by SOM, the Council requested the member states to convey their willingness for holding the Experts Group Meeting (EGM) on IPR.

142. The Council requested the member states to convey the Secretariat the ongoing international regional projects in the field of IPR where ECO countries can also take part. The Council also requested the member states to initiate /intensify technical assistance programmes on (i) preparation of the legal-regulatory bases for intellectual property and interaction in capacity building of the qualified staff in the field of innovative activity; (ii) establishment data banks and data centers in the field of intellectual



properties (patents, trademarks, traditional knowledge, industrial designs and geographical signs etc), R&D Data Centers and industrial supply and demand data banks.

143. The Council also welcomed the offer of the Republic of Turkey to host the Workshop on Agricultural Machinery. The Council also requested the Member States to send their country reports on agro machinery (production, trade, needs and potentials etc.) to the ECO Secretariat.

144. The Council requested the Secretariat to continue its efforts to enhance the cooperation with the international industrial organizations including UNIDO.

145. The Council appreciated the announcement of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan for hosting the 3<sup>rd</sup> ECO Ministerial Meeting on Industry in Islamabad in 2006.

#### **Tourism**

146. Keeping in view the tourism as an important area for ECO cooperation, the Council decided to establish High Level Experts Group (HLEG) on Tourism instead of Experts Group. The Council welcomed the willingness of the Islamic Republic of Iran for hosting the 1<sup>st</sup> HLEG Meeting on Tourism on 27-28 February 2006 or in the second half of June, 2006 in Tehran. The Council requested the Member States to actively participate in the said meeting.

147. The Republic of Turkey expressed its willingness to host the Workshops/events in the field of tourism in 2006.

### **e) Human Resources & Sustainable Development**

148. While welcoming the establishment of a new Directorate titled "Human Resources and Sustainable Development", under the revised organizational structure of ECO Secretariat as per the decision of the 15<sup>th</sup> Meeting of the Council of Ministers (COM), the Council reiterated the importance of human development and sustainable development and expressed hope that the new Directorate will vigorously concentrate on the issues relating to health, education, poverty alleviation, drug control, and other related issues to achieve the goals and objectives in these fields.

#### **Human Development**

149. The Council, while emphasizing upon the need to prepare the short and medium-term programs/goals of this new Directorate, expressed hope that in the long-term of course, there is a possibility for a broader objective/ultimate goal that is to serve as an instrument that will provide the ECO region with an Human Development monitoring tool that can act as a warning system for monitoring the situation in terms of socio-economic status.

150. Reiterating the importance of the human development, poverty alleviation and MDGs as a basis for development of member states, the Council welcomed Secretariat's proposal to organize First Meeting of High Level Experts Group (HLEG) on human development, poverty alleviation and prospect of MDG implementation with possible participation of relevant international organizations for identification the long term objectives/programmes of Human Resource and Sustainable Development Directorate. The Member States will present their National Human Development and MDG Reports in this meeting in order to identify the areas which might require the attention of the policy makers and administrators for preparation of strategies and policies and to arrange courses/programs in different sectors with regard to human development and sustainable development in the member countries. The Secretariat in consultation with the Member States will find the host for this event with possible utilization of Special Support Fund (SSF).

151. The Council requested the Member States to introduce their national focal point/s who work on national human development and MDG reports and who would cooperate with Secretariat in its work.

152. The Council requested the Secretariat, with the help of international consultant/s, to prepare the report of "Development/capabilities of ECO countries on achieving MDGs" and recommended to explore the possibility of allocating the research funds available through the ECO Feasibility Fund and seek CPR's approval in this respect.

153. The Council while emphasizing Member States' efforts to fulfill the Millennium Development goals/targets, welcomed the proposal to organize Workshop on Data and Indicators to monitor progress towards MDGs.

154. The Council agreed to the Secretariat's proposal to hire/take the benefit of the services of an international Consultant to prepare a work-plan for the human and sustainable development activities which may assist the Secretariat in preparing an effective institutional framework for the activities, training the involved staffs, preparing a concept paper on main human development and sustainable development issues and to identify/propose scope of cooperation, to review the NHDRs of Member States, etc. These activities/programs will be approved by a decision



making body of ECO for implementation. Therefore, the Secretariat was requested to make contact with international organizations/financial institutions for financial and technical assistance in this regard.

155. Considering the need for capacity building at the Secretariat regarding Human Development and Sustainable Development, the Council recommended the Secretariat to seek relevant international organizations' support/assistance such as UNESCAP, UNDP, etc. to provide training programs for ECO staffs and relevant officers/experts of Member states involved in preparation of human development and sustainable development reports/activities.

#### **Sustainable Development**

156. Taking into account the multi-sectoral/inter-disciplinary nature of Human Development and Sustainable development issues that require the cooperation of several units in the Secretariat, the Council recommended the close coordination of the three Directorates of HRSD, EME and AIT.

157. The Council requested the Secretariat to contact the international/ regional organizations, institutions such as UNDP, CSD, UNESCAP, UNEP, etc. to achieve the MDGs goals as envisaged in the ECO documents i.e. ECO Vision 2015, as well.

158. The Council supported the objective-oriented participation of the Secretariat in the relevant important meetings/events of international organizations such as UN Commission on Sustainable Development to seek their assistance with regard to ECO programmes/activities on human and sustainable development.

#### **Health**

159. The Council agreed to the proposal of the Secretariat to establish a High Level Experts Group (HLEG) on health to be responsible for identifying activities/programs for regional cooperation in the field of health, population and reproductive health. The Council appreciated the offer of the Islamic Republic of Iran to host (1+1 participants) the 1<sup>st</sup> HLEG which will focus on avian influenza (bird flu) issues on 12-13 March 2006 in Tehran and requested the Member States to actively participate in this meeting. The Iranian Representative stated that the agenda and work program of the said activities will be forwarded to the Secretariat shortly in order to be distributed among the Member States. Furthermore, the Council requested the Secretariat to seek assistance of WHO, FAO, etc. with regard to this activity.

160. The Council took note of the proposal to hold 2<sup>nd</sup> Workshop on the Prevention of HIV/AIDS and exchange of experience, with the assistance of the relevant international organizations and donor agencies.

161. The Council welcomed the proposal of the Republic of Turkey to hold "the Workshop on the ECO School Earthquake Safety Review" in assistance with the Organization of Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) in the first half of 2006 in Turkey, with the possible utilization of the SSF, and requested the member states to participate in the subject event.

162. The Council also requested the member states to send their updated country reports on the activities of their Red Crescent Organizations and status of bilateral cooperation.

163. The Council welcomed the proposal of the Islamic Republic of Iran for hosting the international exhibition and workshop in the field of medical tourism and invited the member states to participate in the event. The Council also welcomed the proposals of the Iranian delegation for establishment of medical exhibitions in ECO countries, joint commission of supporting/improving medical tourism industry and joint investment for establishing the health medical centers and urged the member states to actively participate in these activities. The Council requested Iranian authorities to convey the details.

164. The Council appreciated the proposal of Islamic Republic of Iran to hold a meeting on the issues of health and mal-nutrition in the member countries and advised that the details of the proposal may be provided to the Secretariat for circulation among Member States.

#### **Drug Control Coordination Unit (DCCU)**

165. The Council requested the member states to send their country reports and statistics on the field of drug control in hard copy and through the computerized network of DCCU.

166. The Council requested the member states to take initiative for the harmonization of their legal drug structures in agreement with UN conventions taking into consideration with their national rules and regulations.

167. The Council invited the member states to volunteer in holding regular meetings (National Focal Points, Senior Officials, etc.) and requested them to provide full support to the Secretariat in implementation of ECO Plan of Action on Drug Control, formulation of future strategies for the eradication of narcotic drugs from the region and review the activities of DCCU.

168. The Council welcomed the proposal of the 1<sup>st</sup> Senior Officials Meeting (SOM) on drug control and related matters to set up an Experts Group Meeting (EGM) in order to:

- Study to enhance the capacity of DCCU with the possibility of its transformation from “Unit” to “Regional Center” for Drug Control and Organized Crime.
- Harmonize the legal structures of Member States on drug control and allied crimes through a Regional Legal Document, taking into consideration the national rules and procedures of the Member States.
- Revise the Action Plan based on the recommendations of 1st Senior Officials Meeting on Drug Control Matters (SOM) and following up other decisions taken by the aforementioned meeting.

169. The Council requested the Secretariat to finalize the preparation of the 1st Interior Ministers Meeting in order to provide guidelines on drug control, combating organized crimes, money – laundering, harmonization of the legal structure etc. and appreciated the proposal of Islamic Republic of Iran to host this meeting.

170. The Council requested the Secretariat to follow up the “Project Idea Document” prepared by ECO-UNODC and requested to approach international/regional organizations and donor agencies for obtaining technical/financial assistance.

171. The Council welcomed the Secretariat’s proposal to organize training programs, workshops and meetings (National Focal Points & Liaison Officers’ Meeting, 1st ECO Interior Ministers Meeting, 2nd Senior Officials’ Meeting, Experts Group Meeting, Training Course for “Narcotics and Custom Officers”, Risk Analyzing & Profiling Course, Drug Concealment Areas and Searching Techniques Course, Workshop on Prevention of HIV/AIDS) on drug control matters by taking the assistance of some related training academies such as Turkish International Academy against Drugs and Organized Crime (TADOC), Iranian National Police Training Centre and Anti Narcotics Force Academy in Pakistan.

#### **f) Project and Economic Research & Statistics**

##### **Project Research:**

172. In light of the decision of the 15<sup>th</sup> ECO Council of Ministers meeting regarding the re-organization of the Secretariat and the merger of two Directorates i.e Project Research and Economic Research & Statistics, the Council reviewed activities/programmes of these Directorates in a joint session. It asked the Secretariat to provide the general scope of activities/programmes of the new Directorate of Project and Economic Research & Statistics (PERS) to the member states.

173. The Council took note of the implementation of the Plan of Action for ECO’s participation in the Reconstruction of Afghanistan and welcomed the selection of a Project concerning the construction of Deh Mazang Public Park and maintenance of Kabul Zoo. The Council called for early execution of said project, which would symbolise unity and cooperation amongst the ECO Member States towards Reconstruction of Afghanistan. The Council while supporting proposals/recommendations made in the Seminar on the Reconstruction of Afghanistan held in Kabul in November 2005 called for greater involvement of the Member States in this regard. The Council further requested the Member States to positively respond to the Secretariat’s communication requesting the Member States to consider constructing pavilions in the Park, which may depict their social and cultural heritage.

174. The Council appreciated the announcement made by the Islamic Republic of Iran in the 15<sup>th</sup> COM pledging nearly US dollars 400,000/- for the Special Fund for the Reconstruction of Afghanistan and urged other Member States to come forward and join Pakistan and Iran so that other construction projects could also be undertaken in Afghanistan. The Council also expressed satisfaction over the assistance being given to Afghanistan by Member States within the bilateral context.

175. The Council took note of the draft feasibility study report on rehabilitation of Nawar Bridge of Hesarak in Nangarhar Province prepared by ECO Consultancy & Engineering Company (Pvt.) Ltd. (ECO-CEC) and as referred in the recommendations of the Seminar on the Reconstruction of Afghanistan, called upon the Government of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan to find funding for this Project.

176. The Council recommended that another feasibility study for the construction of Canal Crossings in Farah Province of Afghanistan to be financed through ECO feasibility fund may be processed.

177. The Council recommended that while participating in the infrastructure project in Afghanistan, the Member States may also consider further helping that country in capacity and institution building process and that training facilities may be offered to the Afghan experts and officials particularly in areas such as Trade and Economy. It also noted with appreciation the assistance already being extended by Member States to Afghanistan in this respect.

178. The Council took note of the list of ECO Projects prepared by the Secretariat and recommended the Directorate to coordinate future course of action to be taken in respect of each project in consultation with the Member States.

179. The participants expressed satisfaction at the Training Workshop on "Participatory Project Design based on the Logical Framework Approach" jointly organized by the ECO and UNESCAP in April 2005 at the ECO Secretariat and recommended the Directorate to continue implementation of similar programmes also with other international agencies aiming at the capacity building of the Secretariat as well as Member States.

180. The Council while welcoming the decision of the 15<sup>th</sup> COM to admit ECO Consultancy & Engineering Company Private Limited (ECO-CEC) as a regional institution of ECO requested ECO-CEC to take active part in the projects aiming at the progress and development of the ECO region. The Council also requested the Member States to encourage their Companies to join ECO-CEC as shareholders.

181. The Council noted the offer of the ECO-CEC to hold the 3<sup>rd</sup> Conference on ECO-CEC's role in the development of ECO Member States at Lahore in March/April 2006. It urged all the Member States to take maximum benefit out of this Conference and ensure their participation in the same. The Council requested the ECO Secretariat to consider financing air tickets of one person from each eligible Member State representing their relevant authorities from the ECO Special Support Fund to attend the said Conference.

182. The Council requested ECO-CEC to consider organizing short-term courses in the fields of highways, transportation, dams, power generation, and transmission, etc. particularly for experts from Afghanistan and Central Asian Republics and further asked the ECO-CEC to send a proposal to the Secretariat in that respect.

183. The Council appreciated the Secretariat's efforts to utilize ECO Feasibility Study Fund to finance projects in the fields of trade and agriculture. It requested the Member States to suggest the feasibility study in the field of transport as well.

184. The Council asked the Secretariat to also explore the possibility of funding and technical support for various ECO projects from the donor agencies of countries such as JICA of Japan, GTZ of Germany, KOICA of the Republic of Korea, TICA of Turkey in addition to the International Organizations.

185. The Council appreciated the preparation of updated editions of the Directory of Training and Research Institutions and the Roster of Leading Experts and Consultants amongst the Member States according to inputs received from Iran, Kyrgyzstan, Pakistan, Tajikistan, Turkey, and Turkmenistan. The Secretariat was asked to make these documents available on ECO website as well as provide this information to relevant focal points through e-mail. The Council further asked Member States to continue sending updated information to the Secretariat for revised editions.

#### **Economic Research and Statistics**

186. The Council stressed upon regular preparation and publication of ECO Annual Economic Reports and noted discontinuation of same since 2000 inter alia due to lack of cooperation/support received from some member states and limited workforce at the Directorate. In view of above the Council urged the member states to provide by the end of April 2006 the necessary inputs for this publication including country reports as well as statistical data according to format to be circulated by the Secretariat immediately. The Council directed the Secretariat to prepare and circulate the first draft of the Report to the member states by the end of June 2006. It further asked the Secretariat to finalize and publish it within one month after the inputs received from member states latest by September 2006.

187. In view of the merger of two Directorates, as was originally recommended by the ECO Eminent Persons Group (EPG), the Council advised the Secretariat to strengthen present staffing of this Directorate through creation or revival of a new post at the Programme/Research Officer level with strong background on economics.

188. The Council expressed its regrets that the 5<sup>th</sup> meeting of NFPs had not been held since 2002. It urged the Secretariat to schedule the said meeting to be held at the ECO Secretariat during June 2006 and finance air tickets from ECO Special Support Fund for participants from the eligible member states, consent with the approval of CPR. The Council requested the Secretariat to draw up a practical methodology on hosting subsequent meetings of NFPs and convey it to the Member States for their comments before the 5<sup>th</sup> NFP meeting in order to be finalized and adopted in the said meeting. It was agreed that regular holding of NFPs meetings would contribute to the regular publication of the Annual Economic Report.

189. The Council recommended the Directorate to continue facilitating various ECO summits/meetings, ECO News Bulletins and ECO Website by contributing reports/papers relating to the region's macro-economic developments.

190. While emphasizing the expediency of intensification of ECO activities in the field of statistics, the Council underlined the importance of early finalization of draft ECO Framework of Cooperation in Statistics and Plan of Action. The Council requested those member states, who have not done so to convey their views/comments on the draft Framework of Cooperation and Plan of Action by the end of May 2006 so that the same could be discussed in the meeting of National Focal Points on Economic Research and Statistics to be held in due course.

191. The Council appreciated the work of the Secretariat with regard to preparation and publishing separate draft country-wise statistic bulletins for Kyrgyzstan and Turkey. The Council requested the member states to provide regular national statistics along with adequate metadata based on the electronic forms provided by the Secretariat in order to enable the Secretariat to fulfill the data gaps, update and overcome the factors which withheld the preparation of country-wise statistical bulletins for other member states. The Council requested the Secretariat to speed up publishing each ECO Statistic Bulletin in consent with the concerned member states.

192. The Council acknowledged the need to regularly discuss and assess progress made in achieving ECO goals/objectives based on commonly agreed statistical indicators. To this end, the Council appreciated the Secretariat work in preparing ECO Countries Key Indicators for 2004 presenting the most current available economic, financial, and social data on the ECO member countries during 2000-2004 and pasting at ECO Website. In order to ensure that said Indicators' concise layout make an easier presentation towards the key ECO targets, the Council further requested the National Focal Points (NFPs) to revise and shortlist 14 Key Indicators based on structural indicators relating to ECO cooperation activities, which should be ECO's flagship electronic publication at its Website.

193. The Council recommended that the CPR may consider allocating funds from the ECO Feasibility Study Fund for the research projects proposals submitted by the member states within the framework of the ECO Joint Economic Research Programme whenever required. Further more, in order to facilitate these project proposals, the Secretariat was requested to approach international donors, especially UNDP, IDB, World Bank, ADB to secure their financial and technical support and report the results to the next NFPs meeting in June 2006.

194. The Council requested the Directorate in coordination with the Trade and Investment Directorate of the Secretariat to paste the data/information provided earlier by the member states for the ECO Business Guidebook on ECO Trade and Investment website ([www.tradeeco.org](http://www.tradeeco.org)). It also urged the member states to provide relevant up date information for regular improvement of this website.

195. The Council requested the member states and the Secretariat to promote organization of a regional workshop on the non-observed economy (NOE) in the ECO region with the support of the relevant international organizations, which would also be allied with the member states' work plan in measurement of NOE.

#### **g) Inter-Regional ECO Activities**

##### **i. ECO Regional Institutions and Specialized Agencies**

##### **ii. International relations**

196. The Council reiterated its recommendation that the non-signatory member states should sign the Charter of ECO Cultural Institute (ECI), ECO Science Foundation and ECO Educational Institute and requested the signatory member states to ratify these Charters at the earliest.

197. The Council appreciated the approval of the ECI Three Year Plan by the 94<sup>th</sup> session of Council of Permanent Representatives (CPR) and requested the member states to assist the ECI in the finalization and implementation of its long-term operational plan as well as its annual programme of work.

198. The Council took note of the explanations provided by the representative of the ECO Cultural Institute and requested the member states to participate actively in the First ECI Preparatory Experts Meeting for Board of Trustees (BOT) on February 27-28, 2006 to be held in Tehran and its Third Board of Trustees (BOT) meeting to be held in Islamabad on 25-26 April 2006. The Council also welcomed the offer of the Government of the Islamic Republic of Iran to provide financial assistance to ECI for organizing the Preparatory Experts Meeting for Board of Trustees (BOT).



199. In line with the approval of ECI three year plan, the Council emphasized on the recruitment of highly qualified technical/expert staff in ECI and for attracting the funds from other sources for effective implementation of its Plan of Action.

200. The Council requested the Islamic Republic of Pakistan to expedite the process of appointment of Executive Director of ECI.

201. The Council requested that necessary steps may be taken by all concerned member states for early approval of the ECI budget for the year 2006 and timely remittance of their shares to its budget.

202. Majority of the member states have provided their views/comments on the modified Charter of ECO Science Foundation. The Council called upon the Government of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan to announce the exact date for the First Meeting of the Board of Trustees (BOT) before the 16<sup>th</sup> Council of Ministers (COM) meeting to review the modified Charter and draft revised Basic Documents. The Council also requested the member states to confirm their participation at a high level.

203. The member states who have not provided their views on the modified Charter and the draft basic documents of ECO Science Foundation are requested to do so at the earliest.

204. The Charter of ECO Educational Institute has already been ratified by the required number of member states. The representative of the Republic of Turkey informed the Council that the ratification of ECO Educational Institute by the Republic of Turkey is under process. The Council requested the Republic of Turkey to announce the exact venue and date for holding the 1<sup>st</sup> meeting of the Board of Trustees (BOT) of the Educational Institute.

205. The Council appreciated the ECO College of Insurance for launching a new degree programme of M.A. Area Studies (ECO region) from September 2005 and for offering 10 under-graduate scholarships to the member states. The Council requested the member states to expedite the process of nominations. It recommended to ECO College of Insurance to publicize its activities to make the people in ECO region well aware of its activities.

206. As per the recommendations of the Eminent Persons Group and 15<sup>th</sup> RPC meeting, the Working Group proposed by the Dean of ECO College of Insurance was established to facilitate the transition of ECO College of Insurance into ECO College of Management Sciences. The Council welcomed the holding of two initial meetings of the Working Group and recommended that the meeting may be continued and the recommendations/outcome of the Working Group pertaining to the statute of the ECO College of Management Sciences including its main activities, legal status, financial resources, etc. may be submitted through CPR to the 16<sup>th</sup> Council of Ministers for approval.

207. The Council requested the member states to retain the word Insurance to the name of ECO College of Insurance since it is recognized internationally for the past few decades. However, the other part of Business Administration or Management Sciences or any other could be added to the ECO College of Insurance after deliberations in the Working Group Meeting.

208. The Council called upon ECO College of Insurance and ECO Cultural Institute to draw up joint activities and collaboration between relevant ECO affiliated bodies to start joint programmes and activities to the benefit of people of the region.

209. The Council welcomed the status of specialized agency granted by 15<sup>th</sup> COM to ECO-CEC and welcomed the participation of ECO-CEC in the 16<sup>th</sup> RPC meeting in the capacity of specialized agency. The Council recommended the involvement of ECO-CEC in regional projects and called upon the member states to accord priority to ECO-CEC while offering implementation of projects to regional and international companies for the projects which are financed from ECO resources.

### **International Relations**

210. The Council took note with appreciation the efforts of the ECO Secretariat to promote relations with international/regional organizations and UN bodies. The Secretariat has been endeavouring to provide ECO greater international visibility as well as help seeking financial and technical expertise from the international donor agencies. However, there is a large number of regional organizations like ECO, competing in international arena for funds, technical assistance and support available with international financial Institutions, donor agencies and donor countries. ECO needs to work hard to compete for scarce resources present internationally.

211. The Council while appreciating the signing of MOU between Economic Cooperation Organization (ECO) and Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) Secretariats emphasized that the Secretariat should categorize international/regional organizations with which the ECO has already institutionalized cooperative relations and establish a follow-up mechanism with regard to the high priority category.



212. The Council welcomed the decision taken by the 15<sup>th</sup> Council of Ministers (COM) that the Secretariat should establish a follow-up mechanism with regard to its cooperative relations with different regional and international organizations and also prepare an action plan to enhance its cooperation with these organizations. The Council requested the Secretariat to prepare proposed draft Plan of Action for the implementation of that decision and submit to 16<sup>th</sup> COM through the Council of Permanent Representatives (CPR) for final approval. The Council also recommended:

- To reactivate Contact Group within ECO to pursue and support international relations.
- To work on the idea of dialogue partnership with international organizations and donor countries in order to mobilize the financial and technical assistance for the implementation of ECO regional projects.

#### **Agenda Item No.9**

##### Annual ECO Calendar of Events for 2006-2007

213. The Council approved the ECO Calendar of Events for 2006/2007 (as provided in **Annex. VI**) with the following observations:-

- If the date of the meetings were not announced within three months after 16<sup>th</sup> RPC meeting, the Secretariat would inform the CPR to consider revise the Calendar of Events.
- The Secretariat should establish a close relationship with the NFPs well in advance of the meetings so that the required documents/working papers and necessary information with regard to the events / meetings could reach the relevant authorities of the member states in time while keeping the respective Missions of the Member States fully in picture.
- In order to avoid rush of activities towards the end of the year, the Member States should plan the activities evenly throughout the year. If the date and venue of the meeting/event in the calendar will not be determined by October, those events may be shifted to the next year's calendar with the approval of CPR.
- New member states may be encouraged to offer hosting the ECO meetings especially in the areas of their interest.

#### **Agenda Item No.10**

##### Preparation of Annual Economic Report

214. The Council took note of the discussions held on this subject during the Review Committee meeting of the Project and Economic Research & Statistics Directorate. (Paras 186 & 188 refer). It called for the regular publication of this report and taking into consideration the merger of Project Research and Economic Research & Statistics Directorates and increased responsibilities of the Directorate, the Council recommended that staffing requirements of the same should also be looked into to make it more efficient and result-oriented.

#### **Agenda Item No.11**

##### Any other business.

215. No issue was raised under this agenda item.

#### **Agenda Item No.12**

##### Date and Venue of the next Meeting.

216. The Council requested the Secretariat to consult the Member States to finalize date and venue of the next RPC meeting. The Secretariat would work out about the dates and venue of the meeting and convey through diplomatic channels to the member states.

#### **Agenda Item No.13**

##### Adoption of the Report.

217. The Report of the 16<sup>th</sup> meeting of the Regional Planning Council (RPC) was adopted unanimously.

#### **Agenda Item No.14**

##### Vote of Thanks

218. On behalf of all the participating delegations, the Council expressed its appreciation and thanks to the ECO Secretariat as well as Government of the Islamic Republic of Iran for making appropriate arrangements for organization of this important meeting.

219. The Council concluded with a vote of thanks to the Chair for conducting the deliberations of the meeting in a smooth and efficient manner. The Council also thanked the Chairmen of various Review Committees for successfully conducting the business of their respective Review Committees. It also appreciated the efforts made by the Secretary General and his staff for preparing comprehensive Working Papers and other documents for the Council.

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