

The 15th RPC Meeting

Report

(Tehran, 14-17 February, 2005)

1. The Fifteenth Meeting of the Regional Planning Council (RPC) of the Economic Cooperation Organization (ECO) was held on February 14-17, 2005 at the ECO Secretariat, Tehran. Preparatory/Review meetings were also held on the sidelines of the RPC meeting.

2. 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, Turkmenistan, the Republic of Uzbekistan and Secretary General of ECO along with relevant staff of ECO Secretariat participated in the meeting. The representatives of the Turkish Cypriot State participated in the meeting. The representatives of the ECO Cultural Institute and ECO College of Insurance also attended 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. Mr. Hamid Riza Shoraka, Vice-President and Head of State Planning and Management Organization of the Islamic Republic of Iran. In his inaugural statement, the Vice President stated that globalization of economic relations was a challenge for the developing countries and regionalization of ECO could remedy its negative impacts and ECO could provide a conducive ground for realization of the regional development goals. He emphasized the need for regular participation of the representatives of private sector in ECO activities and establishment of transport network with the Central Asian landlocked countries. He reminded that it was high time to revise ECO strategy to deal with the present time challenges as well as integration of regional policies may be harmonized with international trade. He was of the view that regular meetings of Senior Officials and other supervisory bodies of ECO could help to achieve objectives of the organization. A copy of his statement is attached at *Annex-II*.

4. H.E. Mr. Askhat Orazbay, Secretary General ECO delivered his introductory statement to the Plenary Session. While touching upon the performance of the Organization, the Secretary General briefly informed the participants about the ECO activities that had taken place since the last RPC meeting. He also briefed the Council on the future plans and programmes. He urged the member states to reactivate public and private sector for promotion of economic activities in the region and implementation of various projects and agreements in a realistic approach. A copy of his statement is attached at *Annex-III*.

Agenda Item No. 2

Election of the Chairman

5. H.E. Mr. Isroil Makhmudov, Deputy Minister on Trade and Economy of the Republic of Tajikistan, being incumbent COM Chairman, was unanimously elected as the Chairman of the meeting.

Agenda Item No. 3

Adoption of the Agenda

6. The Council adopted the following Agenda for its meeting:

1. Inauguration of the meeting.
2. Election of the Chairman.
3. Adoption of the Agenda.
4. Statements by the heads of delegation.
5. Consideration of the Report of the Secretary General on ECO activities for 2004.
6. Consideration of the new programmes and projects for 2005 in the following areas:
 - Trade and Investment;

- Transport and Communications;
 - Energy, Minerals & Environment;
 - Agriculture, Industry & Health;
 - Project Research and Economic Research & Statistics
 - Activities related to Economic Research & Statistics
 - ECO Regional Institutions and Specialized Agencies
 - i) Drug Control
 - ii) International relations
7. Annual ECO Calendar of Events for 2005-2006.
 8. Any other business.
 9. Date and venue of the next meeting.
 10. Adoption of the Report.
 11. Vote of thanks.

Agenda Item No. 4

Statements by the Heads of Delegation

7. 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-IV*.

Agenda Item No. 5

Consideration of the Report of the Secretary General on ECO activities for 2004

8. The Secretary General of ECO presented his annual report to the Council on the activities of the Organization during 2004. The Secretary General apprised the Council, in detail, of the significant features of the activities of the Organization. A copy of the Report is enclosed at *Annex-V*.

9. 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. 6

Consideration of the new Programmes and Projects for 2005

10. In view of the presence of high dignitaries from the member states, the sessions for sectoral preparatory/review meetings were presided over by the representatives of the countries as under:

- a. **Trade and Investment** by H.E. Dr. Ahmet TIKTIK, Undersecretary, State Planning Organization of the Republic of Turkey
- b. **Transport and Communications** by H.E. Dr. Sabit Tairov, Ambassador of the Republic of Kazakhstan in Tehran
- c. **Energy, Minerals & Environment** by H.E. Mr. Muhammad Humayun Farshori, Secretary, Planning and Development Division, Islamic Republic of Pakistan
- d. **Agriculture, Industry & Health** by H.E. Mr. Reza Ashraf Semnani, Acting Deputy Minister Planning, Development and Technology, Ministry of Industries & Mines, Islamic Republic of Iran
- e. **Project Research** by H.E. Prof. Nazir Ahmad Shahidi, Deputy Minister of Economy of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan
- f. **Economic Research and Statistics** by Mr. R. Huseynov, Director of Antimonopoly Policy Department of the Ministry of Economic Development, Republic of Azerbaijan
- g. **ECO Specialized Agencies/Regional Institutions, Science & Technology, Culture & Education, Drug Control and International Relations** by H.E. Mr. Morteza Daman Pak, Ambassador, Director of ECO Affairs Bureau, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Islamic Republic of Iran

11. 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 2004-

2005, highlighting the progress made in the implementation of the activities approved by 14th COM meeting and formulated the recommendations in the following paragraphs proposing future course of action and activities in 2005 and 2006.

12. 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 2004 in all sectors.

a) Trade and Investment

13. The Council expressed satisfaction over the outcome of First meeting of High Level Experts Group on Trade, Investment and Other Related Matters, held in Ankara, Turkey on January 13-15, 2004 recommending the Fast Track Approach for the signatory member states of ECOTA. It noted that much time has elapsed and proper progress not been made for early implementation of ECOTA. The process should be expedited with fast pace in the forthcoming Second Meeting of HLEG, to be held on March 17-19, 2005 in Islamabad.

14. The Council recommended to the HLEG on Trade, Investment and Other Related Matters to negotiate and finalize the optional protocol to ECOTA, based on the recommendation of its first meeting with a view to implementing ECOTA on fast-track basis, keeping the options open for the other member states. The outcome of HLEG discussion on fast track approach will be presented to the Third ECO Ministerial Meeting on Commerce/Foreign Trade to be held in Turkey on 5-7 July 2005 for approval and signature. Those member states of ECO that are contracting parties to ECOTA may sign the Optional Protocol to ECOTA during the Third Ministerial Meeting on Commerce/Foreign Trade.

15. The Council reviewed the status of ratification of ECOTA by the signatory member states and urged the non-signatory member states to join the Agreement.

16. The Council requested those member states, who have not done so to convey their views/comments on the draft Rules of Origin, Rules of Procedures of Cooperation Council for ECOTA, Anti-Dumping Measures and negative lists of products for early finalization of annexes to be attached with the Agreement.

17. The Council directed the ECO Secretariat to prepare a regional trade strategy taking into consideration the past experiences and practices with regard to ECOTA and Fast Track Approach as an integrated approach which will involve signatory and non-signatory member states.

18. The Council welcomed the offer of the Republic of Turkey to host 3rd ECO Ministerial Meeting on Commerce/Foreign Trade on 6-7 July, 2005 preceded by 3rd meeting of High Level Experts Group on Trade, Investment and Other Related Matters on 05 July 2005 in Istanbul, Turkey and requested the member states to participate in the meeting with their active and meaningful contribution.

19. The Council noted that draft Agreement on Promotion and Protection of Investment among the ECO member states is long awaited agreement which must be finalized in the 2nd meeting of HLEG on Trade, Investment & Other related matter, to be held in Islamabad on March 17-19, 2005 for submission before the 3rd ECO Ministerial Meeting on Commerce/Foreign Trade.

20. While thanking the Government 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 called upon the member states to encourage their Central Banks to expedite the process for signing of MOU for sharing of information and experiences among the member states. The Council underlined that the meetings of the Heads of Central Banks of the member states may be held on regular basis.

21. 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 requested the member states for hosting the First meeting of HLEG to study and suggest a framework for cooperation in the areas of Finance/Economy and prepare ground work for the Second Ministerial Meeting on Finance/Economy.

22. The Council recognized that the involvement of private sector in trade and economic promotion activities will 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.

23. The Council thanked the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan for holding the 7th General Assembly Meeting of ECO-CCI and commended the decision of the member states for granting Chairmanship and Secretariat of ECO-CCI to Afghan Chamber of Commerce and Industry for two years and expressed its hope that ACCI will give more impetus to reactivate ECO-CCI.

24. The Council urged the current Chairman of ECO-CCI to convene the meeting of 10th Executive Committee of ECO-CCI as soon as possible to revise Statute of ECO-CCI and consider alternative mechanism for private sectors participation such as Business Support Centres, Business Advisory Council.

25. The Council requested the Turkish authorities to consider for hosting the Business Forum on the sidelines of 3rd ECO Ministerial Meeting on Commerce/Foreign Trade.

26. The Council recommended for continuation of the 2nd phase of ECO/ITC project integrated with Capacity Building of ECO-CCI utilizing the ECO Feasibility Study Fund with authorization of CPR.

27. The Council took note of the proposals of some member states to host the permanent Secretariat of ECO-CCI and recommended ECO-CCI to decide about the location of permanent Secretariat.

28. The Council welcomed the recognition of ACCI and ECO-CCI as the counterpart for reconstruction of Afghanistan by UNDP project "Promotion of Regional Supply of Goods, Services and Expertise for Afghanistan Reconstruction" and commended the initiatives of ECO Secretariat in this regard.

29. The Council thanked the Islamic Republic of Pakistan for hosting the 3rd meeting of Council of ECO Heads of Customs Administration (CHCA), held on March 8-10, 2004 in Islamabad and noted with appreciation the progress made on the draft Agreement on establishment and operation of ECO Smuggling and Customs Offences Data Bank. It urged upon the member states to finalize the Agreement in the 4th meeting of CHCA to be held on May 16-18, 2005 in Baku, Azerbaijan.

30. The Council noted with satisfaction holding of different training courses by Azerbaijan, Iran, Pakistan and Turkey for the customs officials of Afghanistan and other ECO member states and called upon the other member states who have expertise in this field to arrange such training/orientation courses on regular basis for ensuring exchange of information and expertise.

31. The Council welcomed the positive consideration of the Islamic Republic of Iran to hold the Experts Group meeting composed of representatives of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and ECO-CCI to revise Agreement on Simplification of Visa Procedure for Businessmen of ECO member states.

32. The Council advised the ECO Secretariat to present the results of the study on simplification and harmonization of customs procedures, conducted by the Secretariat with the technical and financial assistance of the relevant international organization to the 4th meeting of CHCA for achieving the objectives of simplification and harmonization of customs procedures.

33. Appreciating the signing of MOU between ECO and World Customs Organization (WCO) the Council urged the Secretariat to fully implement it. It also requested the forthcoming meeting of CHCA to consider the ways and means for the materialization of cooperative relations as envisaged in the MOU.

34. The Council thanked the Islamic Republic of Pakistan for organization of the 3rd ECO Seminar on Trade and Investment Information Networking, held on 31 January – 01 February 2005 in Karachi and appreciated the launching of ECO Trade-Net. Highlighting the vital need for evolving a workable mechanism for development of website, it noted with appreciation that the website will promote trade and investment activities among the member states. The Council also urged the member states to nominate focal points including focal points from Chambers of Commerce and submit data / information on trade values, trade figures on the major commodities actually traded, trade regime, rules and regulations and other relevant information to fully functionalize the website. The Council appreciated the Islamic Chamber of Commerce & Industry of OIC and International Trade Centre (ITC) for their active participation in and contribution to the Seminar.

35. The Council appreciated the work done in the Trilateral meetings on establishment of ECO Trade and Development Bank and Reinsurance Company, held in April and June 2004 in Ankara and Islamabad respectively and strongly urged the member states to expedite the matter with regard to the awarding of new consultancy for preparing Business Plan for early establishment of the Bank. Welcoming the approval of CPR for financing the preparation of Business Plan from ECO Feasibility Fund, it called upon Islamic Republic of Pakistan to provide the list of the competent consultancy firms to be considered for selection to prepare the Business Plan. It also called upon the next Trilateral meeting to be held on February 17, 2005 at the ECO Secretariat to devise the modalities for selection of the Consultancy Company.

36. The Council thanked the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan for hosting 2nd ECO Trade and Investment Conference in Kabul on April 18-19, 2004 the first ever ECO event since accession of Afghanistan to ECO and applauded the efforts of ECO Secretariat for its contribution to the efforts of international community towards Afghanistan's development.

37. The Council welcomed the offer of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan to organize the 3rd ECO Trade and Investment Conference in Kabul.

38. The Council noted with satisfaction already existing relations between ECO and other international organizations such as UNDP, UNCTAD, ITC, UNECE, UNESCAP and appreciated the emerging cooperation between ECO Secretariat and Asian Development Bank (ADB), World Bank and ASEAN and advised the Secretariat to further work for close cooperation with other trade-related international institutions.

b) Transport & Communications

39. The Council noted with appreciation the endeavours made by the member states to complete the infrastructure projects identified in the Programme of Action for the ECO Decade of Transport and Communications (1998-2007). In this respect the Council emphasized on the need to have updated information about the activities under taken by all the member states to implement the said Programme. The Council, therefore, urged the member states to send the requisite information to the Secretariat as requested in the Secretariat's note No.TC/PAEDT/2005/0148 dated 24th January 2005.

40. The Council appreciated the efforts of the member states for completing the missing links such as the completion of Kerman-Bam link by Iran in the year 2003. The Council expressed the hope that other important missing railway links such as Bam-Zahidan railway link, rehabilitation of Taftan-Quetta railway link and by-pass of Lake Van of the East-West transport corridor may also be completed as soon as possible.

41. The Council while recalling the Dushanbe declaration that "emphasized the urgency of early ratification and implementation of the Transit Transport Framework Agreement (TTFA) for the promotion

of trade and transport within ECO region and beyond and called upon those member states who had not ratified the same to do so as soon as possible” expressed the hope that those member states who have not yet ratified this agreement would initiate appropriate measures to ratify this important agreement without further delay.

42. With a view to early operationalize the Trans-Asian Railway main line (Almaty-Istanbul) and to solve the technical problems in the way of smooth running of the container trains on this route, the Council urged the member states to nominate their members at the earliest to work on the Working Group and its sub-groups being established for this purpose. The Terms of Reference for the selection of the members of the Working Group have been circulated by the Secretariat vide note No.TC/WG-ToR/2005/0060 dated 9th January 2005.

43. The Council requested the member states that have not yet sent their comments on the Draft Agreement on the Establishment and Operation of Common Containers Pool (CCP) for the Almaty-Istanbul container train prepared by Kazakhstan to convey the same to the Secretariat at the earliest.

44. The Council while recalling the Dushanbe declaration which urged all member states to do their utmost for the early operationalization of the Trans-Asian Railway main line project requested the member states to take proactive part in discussions on the removal of technical and non-technical obstacles relating to the smooth operationalization of container and passenger trains on the said Railway line. In this regard, the Council requested all the member states especially Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan to consider hosting the first meeting of the Working Group being established for that purpose.

45. The Council further requested the member states to cooperate more closely to remove non-physical impediments in the way of running of passenger train particularly on issues such as high visa fee as well as the security issues. The Council recommended that these issues may also be discussed by the above-mentioned Working Group.

46. The Council took note of the decisions of the 1st Working Group meeting to fine-tune draft Action Plan for revitalizing and operating the China-Middle East-Europe corridor (Tehran/May 2004) and 8th Meeting of Heads of ECO Railway Authorities (Istanbul/July 2004) to harmonize the existing railway information system of the member states and upgrading them by using internet in order to make the necessary information accessible to all ECO member states. The Council requested the member states to send to the Secretariat the reports on the activities which have been undertaken by them in this regard.

47. The Council welcomed the signing of the MoU on ECO Railway Tariff Policy in Istanbul in July 2004 and requested the Member States to prepare reports on the measures taken by them to bring their tariffs closer to each other in order to optimize the share of transport cost in price formation as well as to increase the competitiveness of the railway transport as compared to other modes. The Council expressed the hope that a progress report on the implementation of the said MoU would be sent to the Secretariat by the member states.

48. The Council welcomed the offer of the Republic of Kyrgyzstan to host the 9th Meeting of the Heads of ECO Railway Authorities in July/August 2005 and expressed the hope that all the members would actively participate in the same.

49. The Council asked the Iranian Railway authorities to publish the second edition of ECO Railway Network Map incorporating the viewpoints of those member states that have already sent their views before the suggested deadline.

50. The Council asked the member states to introduce their nominees for the Expert Meeting of the ECO Road Map which will be held in ECO Secretariat shortly to make the final decision on the said Map to be published by the Iranian authorities. Moreover, the Council asked the Turkish authorities to prepare the draft Directory on ECO Road Network after publication of the said Map and asked the member states to provide the Turkish authorities with the necessary information in this regard.

51. The Council requested the member states to convey the information about physical and non-physical obstacles to road transportation within their respective countries to the ECO Secretariat at the earliest to help the Secretariat to initiate projects in cooperation with international organizations. The Council also requested the member states to assess and send their views on Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) on the Harmonization and Facilitation of International Road Transport in the ECO Region made by Turkey in the 4th ECO Ministerial Meeting on Transport and Communications held in Izmir in September 2002.

52. The Council agreed to the Iranian proposal to hold an Experts' Group meeting prior to the 1st Meeting of the ECO Insurance Authorities in the last week of July 2005 in Tehran.

53. The Council was informed about the decision taken in the Extraordinary General Assembly Meeting of the ECO Shipping Company held in Tehran on January 10, 2005 to liquidate the Company and its decision to apply to the court for declaration of bankruptcy of the Company due to the financial problems.

54. The Council, however, recommended that the ECO member states may closely cooperate in the field of shipping by signing bilateral preferential agreement between their shipping companies.

55. The Council agreed on the importance of holding the Second Meeting of the Heads of Reference Marine Organizations and welcomed the Turkish delegation's offer to host the Second Meeting of the Heads of Reference Marine Organizations in Istanbul in the 2nd week of July 2005. The Turkish side would also consider possibility of holding an expert level meeting prior to this meeting on promoting coordination among seaport organizations of the member states. The Council also requested active participation by the member states in the meeting(s). The Council also recommended that the ECO member countries consider closer cooperation in this field.

56. The Council urged the Civil Aviation Authorities of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan and the Republic of Turkey to provide their own versions of the Draft Framework Agreement on Cooperation in the field of Air Transport as was suggested in the 14th RPC. The Council recommended to the Member States to consider the Draft Framework Agreement on Cooperation in the field of Air Transport prepared by Kazakhstan in accordance with the decisions of the First Meeting of Heads of Civil Aviation (Karachi, 12-14 February 2001) and to consider as the basis for other concerned Member States to prepare their own versions of the said Framework Agreement.

57. The Council while commending the Republic of Azerbaijan for successfully holding the 4th Trans-Asia-Europe Fiber Optical Cable System (TAEFOS) meeting in October 2004 requested other member states to volunteer hosting the next meeting of TAEFOS. The Council requested the member states (except Turkey) to fill the Performa prepared by Kazakhstan and circulated to the member states about Transit Prices of TAEFOS Parties and to send it to Kazakh authorities under intimation to the Secretariat at the earliest.

58. The Council suggested the member states to get connected to TAEFOS network and also make their tariff policies more rational. The Council also invited the member states to make further investments in the field of TAEFOS.

59. The Council asked the Islamic Republic of Iran, the Islamic Republic of Pakistan and the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan to establish an Expert Group to look into the possibilities of linking Afghanistan and Pakistan with TAEFOS at the earliest.

60. The Council appreciated the relevant authorities of the I.R. of Iran for agreeing to host the 14th Meeting of Directors General of National Telecommunications Companies as well as the 2nd Meeting of ECO Postal Authorities and also Information Communication Technology (ICT) High Level Expert Meeting from 2-5 May 2005. In this connection, the Council asked the member states to participate actively in these Meetings due to their vital importance.

61. The Council also appreciated the relevant authorities of Pakistan for hosting the visit of ECO postal experts to the Pakistan Postal Training Centre. The exact dates of the visit are being finalized.

62. The Council while referring to the proposal made in the 1st meeting of ECO Postal Authorities (Kyrgyzstan/April 2004) requested the member states to send their viewpoints about the procedure for establishing a Working Group to study the status and structure of postal services of the member states and suggest measures for the improvement of such services and enhancing postal linkages among the member states to the Secretariat.

63. The Council also requested the member states to convey their viewpoints on the proposal made in the first meeting of ECO Postal Authorities meeting regarding the establishment of a Common Data Base, giving updated information on all the postal products as well as the new technologies. The proposal can be extended to the manufacturers of the telecommunications equipment on the basis of the decision taken during the 13th meeting of Directors General of Telecommunications.

64. The Council appreciated the decision of Turkey and Iran to issue a common stamp and invited the other member states to do the same.

65. Referring to the UNDP-ECO Consultant's report on the inspection of border facilities, the Council asked the Secretariat to circulate it to the Member States and continue efforts to complete the remaining parts of the study with the cooperation of UNDP. The Council also requested the member states to facilitate visits of Consultants to their border cross points in case of reactivation of that project.

66. The Council urged the relevant authorities of 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 at the earliest.

67. Referring to 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 Railways and distributed during the 8th meeting of ECO Heads of Railway Authorities (Istanbul/July 2004), the Council requested the member states to convey their views/comments on the Draft Action Plan to the Secretariat at an early date. The Council also requested the member states to volunteer for hosting the 2nd meeting of Working Group to discuss this plan.

68. The Council appreciated the completion of the 1st phase of the ECO/IDB/ESCAP/UNCTAD Multimodal transport project and requested the member states (except, Turkey, Azerbaijan, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan and Kazakhstan) to introduce their national consultants to the ECO Secretariat keeping in view the Terms of Reference circulated by the Secretariat for the selection of the consultants.

69. The Council noted with appreciation the Turkish proposal regarding train project named "Silk Road-Turkish Export Exposition" on Istanbul-Ankara-Tabriz-Tehran-Mashad-Ashkabad-Bukhara-Samarkand-Tashkent-Chimkent-Almaty route to be implemented in April/May 2005 after finalization with the concerned member countries.

c) Energy, Minerals & Environment

Energy

70. Taking into account that the Plan of Action for Energy/Petroleum cooperation in the ECO region was adopted by the 1st ECO Ministerial meeting on Energy /Petroleum for the implementation during the years 2001-2005, the Council emphasized the need for a review of the implementation of the above said Plan of Action. The Secretariat is requested to prepare Draft Plan of Action with the Consultation with the Member States for a new 5 year period to be put on for approval of the 2nd ECO Ministerial Meeting, which is expected to be convened by the end of year 2005/early 2006 in Tehran, Iran. It was stressed that the Member States take active part at the level of Ministers in the said meeting.

71. The Council being informed of the new development with regard to the selection of a consultant for the feasibility study on the interconnection and parallel functioning of ECO countries power systems, requested the Secretariat to accomplish the necessary actions including negotiation and signing a contract with the selected Consultant, in consultation with the Islamic Development Bank (IDB), as soon as the CPR takes a decision on the Consultant, to speed up the commencement of this study. In this connection, the Council called upon the concerned authorities in the member states to provide their utmost cooperation to the Secretariat and the Consultant to be selected for the successful implementation of the above said study. The Council requested the Secretariat to follow up the implementation of the project according to the TOR approved by the member countries.

72. The Council appreciated the readiness of the concerned Turkish authorities to organize the 3rd International Training Course on Energy Conservation and Efficiency with the participation of the ECO member countries, within the framework of the new JICA Project started in 2004, and considered this activity as the continuation of the similar training events arranged in the years 2002 -2003.

73. With reference to para 60 of the 14th RPC meeting report, the Council reiterated the importance of Regional energy trade issues and appreciated the recent collaboration of the Secretariat with the World Bank (WB) in this respect. The Council welcomed WB's proposal to organize jointly a Workshop on Regional Energy Trade and Establishment of ECO Power Market in the ECO countries, tentatively in June 2005 with invitation of multilateral and bilateral donor organizations, especially those that have active programs in the energy sectors of the ECO member states and requested the member states to take an active part in the said event and offer their readiness to host it.

74. The Council was informed by the Turkish authorities of their readiness to convene the Workshop preceding the 4th High Level Experts Task Group (4th HLETG) meeting on ECO Oil and Gas Pipeline route(s) at Ceyhan Terminal of BOTAS, Turkey, during 4-6 May 2005 and requested the member states to confirm/reconfirm their participation in the subject events at the earliest, so that they could take place as scheduled.

75. The Council took note of the development in the field of New and Renewable Sources of Energy (NRSE) and the outcomes of the First ECO Workshop on New and Renewable Sources of Energy held in Ankara, Turkey on May 27-28, 2004. While adopting the proposal of the said event on the establishment of ECO Working Group on NRSE, the Council considered the need of convening the first meeting of this Group in 2005. In this regard the member states were invited to offer to host such an event.

76. The Council took note of the efforts of the Secretariat on the preparation of the project proposal for a pre-feasibility study on the "Development of ECO countries manufacturing capabilities of the equipment used for New and Renewable Energies" and recommended the Secretariat to explore the possibility of allocating the research funds available to the subject study and seek CPR's approval in this respect. Further more, in order to facilitate this project proposal, the Secretariat was requested to continue its contacts with Asian Development Bank (ADB) and UNEP with regard to the possibility of conducting joint activities on NRSE and providing the necessary funds for their implementation.

Minerals

77. The Council took note with appreciation of the finalization of the process of submission of the required data for compilation of ECO Mineral Data Booklet (MDB). The Project Manager (Turkey) introduced the data received from the member states with regard to MDB during the 15th RPC meeting. The Council decided that in order to publish the MDB early 2005, the Secretariat should circulate the above mentioned data for the consideration/views of the member states and get their response within a period of one and a half month, so that the first version of the MDB could be published in due course.

78. Since the Secretariat received several proposals/views of the member states regarding the format for compilation of Metallogenic Map of ECO region, which were circulated to the member states, the Council recommended to consider them at the upcoming 3rd ECO Mineral Experts Group meeting. The Council took note of the efforts of the Secretariat to explore the possibilities of obtaining external

financial support for the establishment of an on-line dynamic and multipurpose ECO Mineral Data Bank and advised the Secretariat to continue these efforts, meanwhile the member states may consider providing necessary assistance in fulfilling this task.

Environment

79. The Council welcomed the outcomes of the Second ECO Ministerial meeting on Environment held on 6 October 2004 in Istanbul including the amended text of the Plan of Action for Cooperation among ECO member states on Environment (2003-2007). While appreciating a number of activities carried out in the framework of the said Plan of Action, the Council emphasized the need to continue implementation of the Plan and welcomed new practical activities proposed by the member states during the 2nd Ministerial Meeting in this respect. The Council took note of the 3rd ECO Ministerial meeting on Environment to be convened in the year 2006.

80. The Council took note of the establishment of the ECO Working Group on Environment (WGE) entrusted with the implementation of the afore mentioned ECO Plan of Action on Environment and endorsed the reports of its 1st and 2nd meetings held on 7-8 April and 4-5 August 2004 in Ankara and Tehran, respectively.

81. The Council took note of the outcomes of the other events convened in the field of Environment such as the Workshop on Waste Water Management and Treatment Technology and the Second Experts Meeting on Energy Resources Development and their Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA), which were convened at the Eastern Mediterranean University of Gazimagosa and in Tehran in May and August 2004, respectively, and recommended these topics to be included in the future working plans in this subject area.

82. The Council took note with the satisfaction of the publication of the first issue of the ECO Quarterly Bulletin on Environment prepared by the ECO Secretariat with the financial assistance of the Islamic Republic of Iran. While appreciating the submission of materials/articles for the first issue of this Bulletin by some member states, the Council requested the concerned authorities in all member states to take active part in the process of preparation of its next issues by submission of their relevant materials.

83. Having noted that eight member states provided to the Secretariat 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, the Council emphasized the need of submission of this report by all member states, twice a year as agreed.

84. The Council appreciated the signing of the Memoranda of Understanding between ECO and the United Nations Environment Program (UNEP) and World Meteorology Organization (WMO) done in year 2004 and advised the Secretariat to identify specific joint activities with these international organizations for obtaining support and assistance for the implementation of the ECO Plan of Action on Environment.

85. The Council took note of the appreciation of UNESCAP for the assistance of the ECO Secretariat and ECO member states in providing necessary data for the ESCAP publication entitled "Electric Power in Asia and the Pacific 2001-2002" and cooperation in the preparation of a "Report on the state of the Environment in Asia and the Pacific 2005 (SOE 2005)" which may provide useful source of data on the Energy and Environment.

86. the council requested the secretariat to continue its cooperation and contacts with international, regional organizations, institutions, banks such as world bank, ADB, IDB, UNESCAP, UNDP, UNEP, UNIDO, OPEC, ECS, WMO, ROPME as well as ASEAN and EU, etc. to achieve the goals in the field of energy, minerals and environment, as envisaged in the eco basic documents.

d) Agriculture, Industry & Health

Agriculture

87. The Council noted with satisfaction the successful implementation of the FAO Technical Cooperation Program (TCP) to support ECO for preparation of a Regional Program for Food Security (RPFS). The Council appreciated the FAO's support to the ECO Secretariat in formulation of a Regional Program for Food Security and Agricultural Development which would also include bankable projects at national and regional level.

88. The Council requested the Secretariat, in cooperation with FAO to continue its efforts for drawing greater donor attention and support to the proposed regional and national projects like FAO/ECO Technical Cooperation Program for Capacity Enhancement on WTO Agreement on Agriculture and Food Safety Regulations, ECO integrated special program for food security, integrated pest management, strengthening quality of seed supply and trade, establishment of buffer zones in border areas for preventing the spread of animal diseases. The Council welcomed the idea of organizing a meeting in Jeddah or Cairo for introducing project ideas and proposals to potential donors like Islamic Development Bank etc. The Council also requested member countries to fully support the efforts of ECO and FAO in this regard, among others, through their bilateral technical assistance programs.

89. Regarding priority areas coordinated by member countries, the Council appraised the progress achieved so far in various fields of cooperation and advised that coordinator countries would organize at least 1-2 training etc. events in a year and convey semi annual progress reports to the member countries and seek more active involvement of relevant international institutions like FAO.

90. The Council welcomed initiative of the Islamic Republic of Iran, as coordinator country for drought mitigation and management, to establish a Regional Center for Drought Management and Mitigation in the ECO Region in Tehran and a Regional Sub-Center for Risk Management of Natural Disasters (especially Drought Monitoring and Early Warning Center) in Mash'ad to address the drought related issues in the region. The Council also requested the Iranian authorities to inform the Secretariat and member states of the latest developments on the establishment of the above-mentioned bodies and requested the other member states to nominate their focal points for implementation of the plan of action.

91. The Council took note with appreciation the signing of a joint MOU for enhancing cooperation between ECO and World Meteorological Organization (WMO) and expressed its hope that it would pave the way for effective support and contribution of WMO in the ECO activities in the field of drought mitigation and management.

92. The Council also welcomed with appreciation the offer of the Republic of Turkey as coordinator country for development of post harvest and processing industries to organize the Workshop on prevention of post-harvest losses of cereals and pulses in 2005 in Turkey. The exact date and venue of which will be communicated to the Secretariat shortly. The Council requested the Secretariat to study the possibility of launching a regional program, with the technical and financial assistance of FAO, for prevention of post harvest losses in the region in a way to contribute to food security and promotion of agro trade.

93. The Council welcomed with appreciation the offer of the Islamic Republic Pakistan, as coordinator country for water management, to host a regional training workshop on water management in 2005 in Pakistan and requested the relevant authorities of I.R. of Pakistan to provide details in this regard. The Council also requested the Islamic Republic of Pakistan to convey their proposed plans to the Secretariat in this regard.

94. Reiterating the importance of the potentials of member states for promotion of agricultural trade, the Council welcomed with appreciation the offer of the Republic of Turkey, as coordinator country for trade promotion, to host a meeting on agro-trade promotion in ECO region in 2005 in Turkey, the details would be communicated in due course.

95. The Meeting welcomed with appreciation the offer of the Plant Protection Organization of the Islamic Republic of Iran as coordinator institution in the field of phyto-sanitary issues to organize a workshop on sanitary

and phyto-sanitary issues in 2005 in I.R. of Iran and requested the Secretariat to approach FAO for possible assistance in this regard.

96. The Council reiterated the importance of the World Trade Organization (WTO) agreements on agriculture and food safety regulations and the needs of member states for capacity enhancement in their relevant departments, welcomed with appreciation the offer of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan and Republic of Turkey to organize training courses on WTO Agreement on Agriculture in 2005/2006 and thus to assist the other member countries in the negotiations for accession to WTO.

97. The Council also urged the member states to instruct their representatives to FAO to support the ECO's proposal for launching a regional program for capacity enhancement in the ECO member states on WTO agreements on agriculture and food safety regulations with the financial/technical contributions of FAO.

98. The Council welcomed and expressed its full support to the proposal for Technical Cooperation Program between FAO and ECO for strengthening the seed supply in the ECO region with a particular emphasis on Central Asia and requested the Secretariat to continue its efforts for the implementation of the said TCP project. The Council also requested member states to support the project by signing it at least at the level of relevant Deputy Ministers/ General Directors of their ministries of agriculture and return it to the Secretariat for formal application to FAO not later than the end of April 2005.

99. The Council took note of the proposal of the Republic of Turkey that Turkish International Cooperation Authority (TICA) for signing a Memorandum of Understanding to support ECO activities, among others, on seed related issues and other areas of agriculture.

100. The Council also took note of the proposal of the Islamic Republic of Iran to support member countries in seed related issues.

101. The Council took note with appreciation the joint efforts of the Secretariat and the Agricultural Biotechnology Research Institute of Iran (ABRII) for establishment of ECO biotechnology network and requested the relevant authorities of the Islamic Republic of Iran to convey to the Secretariat the venue and exact date as well as the other details about the workshop and coordination meeting to be organized in this regard.

102. The Council requested the member countries to provide the Secretariat their proposals/suggestions for regional cooperation on biotechnology and to nominate their focal points for establishment of the ECO Biotechnology Network.

103. Recalling the decisions of the 1st SOM on Agriculture and the 2nd 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. The council also requested the Secretariat to approach FAO and other relevant international organizations to ensure their technical and financial support to the above-mentioned study.

104. The Council welcomed with appreciation the offer of the Islamic Republic of Iran for hosting the 1st Meeting of Heads of Veterinary Organizations of ECO Member Countries on 1-3 September 2005 in Tehran and requested the other member states to actively participate in this important meeting.

105. The Council also welcomed with appreciation the proposal of the Kyrgyz Republic for establishment of an ECO sub-regional center (Central Asia) in Bishkek to control livestock diseases and requested the Kyrgyz authorities to submit details of their proposal.

106. The Council took note with appreciation the endeavors of the 1st ECO Senior Officials Meeting (SOM) on Agriculture held in Tehran in July 2004 and requested that 2nd SOM on Agriculture may be organized in late 2005 or early 2006. The Council invited the member countries to host this event.

107. Taking into consideration the significant share of ECO region in production and export of cotton and cotton based industries, the Council welcomed the proposal of the Republic of Azerbaijan (tentatively) to organize an Expert Group Meeting to study the possibility and modalities of the establishment of an ECO Association/Forum of Cotton Producers/Exporters.

108. Regarding assistance to Afghanistan in the agriculture sector, the Council requested the relevant authorities of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan to convey the details of their project proposals for rehabilitation of agriculture and livestock sectors. The Council also requested the member states to actively take part in the regional endeavors for helping the Afghanistan's rehabilitation and to convey their proposals as well as summary report of their bilateral assistances to Afghanistan to the Secretariat for compilation. The ECO assistance to the agriculture sector of Afghanistan would also be a major pillar of ongoing ECO-FAO cooperation especially within TCP project on food security.

Industry

109. Cognizant of the importance of the ECO activities in the field of industry and decisions of the 1st ECO Ministerial Meeting on Industry held on 25-28 January 2004 in Tehran, the Meeting took note with appreciation the adoption of the Plan of Action for Industrial Cooperation in the ECO region. The Council also appreciated the active contribution and effective follow up of the ministerial decisions by the member states and the Secretariat.

110. The Council took note with appreciation the fruitful deliberations of the Experts Group Meeting for preparation of ECO Regional Strategy on Industry held on 21-23 September 2004 in Turkey and hoped that the finalization and approval of the Strategy would enhance and institutionalize the ECO regional cooperation in the field of industry.

111. The Council welcomed with appreciation the offer of the government of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan for hosting the 2nd Expert Group Meeting on 14-17 March, 2005 in Islamabad and requested the member states to contribute actively to the Meeting. The relevant authorities of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan have informed that I.R. of Pakistan will provide the local hospitality for two participants from each member state and will also bear the cost of air tickets of two delegates from seven member countries (Afghanistan, Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan & Uzbekistan) to the meeting.

112. The Council took note of the key role of coordinator countries and their initiatives for promoting regional cooperation in the selected areas identified in the plan of action and during 1st EGM. The council also requested the member countries to provide the secretariat and the coordinating countries with relevant statistics and information through Questionnaires/Formats and to cooperate in identifying potentials and needs of the member countries and expediting the studies and preparation of draft sub-sectoral strategies for the identified areas.

113. The Council welcomed the initiative of the Islamic Republic of Iran, as one of the coordinator countries for ECO Cooperation in the field of Technology Transfer and Management, for establishment of an ECO Technology Data Bank and operationalization of the ECO Website and Data Bank for Technology Transfer and Management at the address: www.ettcenter.com. The Council also requested the member states to kindly determine their focal points for enhancing cooperation in technology transfer and management, for placing information about their respective countries in above-mentioned website.

114. The Council welcomed with appreciation the offer of the Republic of Turkey for hosting the 2nd Ministerial Meeting on Industry in the third quarter of 2005 in Istanbul. The Representative of Republic of Turkey conveyed that the exact dates would be announced during the Second EGM on Industrial Strategy.

115. Recalling the decision of the 1st ECO Ministerial Meeting on Industry to establish a High Level Experts Group Meeting to coordinate, liaison, monitor, administer and supervise the implementation of the ECO Plan of Action on Industry, the council decided that the Experts Group Meeting for preparation of ECO Regional Strategy on Industry may also act as HLEG. The member states are requested to announce their readiness for hosting the First Meeting of the HLEG and to actively participate in the HLEG meetings.

116. The Council took note with appreciation the drafting of the ECO Plan of Action on Privatization by the First Meeting of the Heads of Privatization Administration of the ECO member states held on 5 July 2004 in Tehran and welcomed the offer of the I.R. of Pakistan to host the Second Meeting of the Heads of Privatization of Administrations of the ECO member states in September-October 2005 in Islamabad.

117. The meeting requested the member states to nominate senior experts for the High Level Experts Group (HLEG) on Privatization and Private Sector Development and appreciated the government of the I.R. of Iran for hosting the 1st HLEG on privatization in the third quarter of 2005 in Tehran.

118. The Meeting also welcomed the offer of the Republic of Turkey, as the coordinator country in private sector development and privatization, to host a Training Course on Privatization. The Republic of Turkey proposed May/June 2005 in Turkey for the event and the exact dates would be determined through diplomatic channels by the Secretariat.

119. Cognizant of the significant role of regional cooperation for harmonization of the rules and regulations of the member states in the fields standardization, accreditation and conformity assessment in industrial development and trade promotion in the region and considering the decisions of the First Ministerial Meeting on Industry entitled in the ECO Plan of Action on Industry, appreciated the efforts of the member countries in these fields.

120. The Council, in pursuance of Tehran Declaration for Industrial Cooperation in ECO Region, the recommendations of the Workshop on "Standardization, Conformity Assessment and Accreditation for ECO member countries" and the report of the First Experts Group Meeting for preparation of ECO Regional Strategy on Industry", requested Turkish Standards Institution (TSE) and Institute of Standards and Industrial Research of Iran (ISIRI), as coordinator institutions in the field of standardization, accreditation and conformity assessment to cooperate on the establishment of ECO Regional Organization for Standardization, Conformity Assessment, Accreditation and Metrology (ROSCAM).

121. In this framework, TSE and ISIRI would prepare the draft Statute and Regional Cooperation Strategy for ROSCAM. TSE shall be responsible for the circulation of the draft Statute through the Secretariat to the national standardization and other related bodies of the member states while ISIRI would be responsible for the circulation of the Regional Cooperation Strategy to the national standardization and other related bodies of the member states through the Secretariat for their views and comments.

122. The Council welcomed the offer of the Republic of Turkey to host the First Experts Group Meeting on Standardization, Conformity Assessment, Accreditation and Metrology in Istanbul in the first half of July 2005 in order to finalize the draft Statute and the draft Strategy.

123. The Council also welcomed the offer of the Islamic Republic of Iran to host the First Meeting of the Heads of Standardization Organizations in August 2005 in Tehran in order to approve the above-mentioned Statute and Strategy.

124. Taking into consideration the important role of Small and Medium sized Enterprises (SMEs) in economic development of member countries, the council took note with appreciation the outcomes of the 2nd ECO Workshop on Development of SMEs held in Ankara & Istanbul from 29 November to 3 December 2004, and welcomed the offer of the Islamic Republic of Iran to host a workshop to study

venture capital systems in the member states with the support of Islamic Development Bank (IDB) and requested the member states to provide their proposals on Development of SMEs for inclusion in the Draft ECO Strategy Document on industry;

125. The Council took note of the proposal of the Islamic Republic of Iran for establishment of industrial clusters in border cities of the member states for development of SMEs in the region.

126. The meeting also advised the secretariat to follow up the implementation of the SMEs related parts of the MOU between ECO and ASEAN.

127. The Meeting welcomed with appreciation the offer of the Islamic Republic of Iran to host the ECO Decision Makers Round Table (DMR) for Chief Executive Officers (CEOs) of large and medium enterprises in the first quarter of 2006 to focus more on investors-cross-regional investment.

Health

128. The council welcomed the proposal for organizing the 1st Meeting of Heads of Red Crescent Organizations of the member states to enhance cooperation among these organizations and to enhance the preparedness of the member countries in the times of disaster and appreciated the offer of the Islamic Republic of Iran to host the meeting in 2005, in Tehran. This meeting may also discuss promotion of trade of pharmaceuticals, medical goods and services.

129. The Council also requested the member states to send their country reports on the activities of their Red Crescent Organization and their proposals about agenda of the 1st Meeting of the Heads of Red Crescent Organizations to the Secretariat.

130. The Council noted with appreciation the proposal of Islamic Republic of Iran to hold a meeting on the issues of hunger and mal-nutrition in the member countries and advised that the details of the proposal may be provided to the Secretariat for circulation and discussion during the next meeting of the Regional Planning Council.

131. 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 permanent 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 details would be conveyed later.

Tourism

132. Keeping in view the directives of the ECO basic documents i.e. Izmir Treaty, for development of ECO region as a Tourist destination, the meeting stressed the need for taking necessary measures for facilitation of visas issuance and enhancing cooperation between the tourism organizations/travel operators within the region. The meeting also welcomed the secretariat's initiative to prepare the ECO Tourist Guide Book and requested the ECO Cultural Institute (ECI) to join this effort and the member states to provide the secretariat with the information/data about their tourism sector (useful information, pictures, statistics, etc.) to be incorporated into the ECO Tourism Guide Book.

133. The RPC welcomed with appreciation the willingness of the Islamic Republic of Iran to host the 3rd ECO Expert Group Meeting on Tourism in 2005 in I.R. of Iran to review the long-term perspectives and to consider the Draft ECO Plan of Action on tourism.

134. The Republic of Turkey expressed its willingness to organize workshops/events in the field of tourism.

Human Resources Development

135. Reiterating the importance of the Human resources as a basis for economic development of member states, the council requested the member states to provide National Human Resource Development Country Reports 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 in order to develop human resources in the countries.

136. The Council also advised the organization of the meeting of heads of poverty alleviation institutions of the member countries

e) Project Research

137. The Regional Planning Council appreciated the follow-up action for the Plan of Action for ECO's participation in Reconstruction of Afghanistan, especially for arranging a financial experts meeting in Kabul and finalization of the Modalities for establishment and subsequent operation of ECO Special Fund for Reconstruction of Afghanistan.

138. While appreciating Pakistan for pledging US\$ 5 million to the ECO Special Fund for Reconstruction of Afghanistan, the Council appealed to other member states to also contribute in the Fund. In this connection, the Council noted the establishment of an Account No. 02132/103276/05 with the Habib Allied International Bank in London. The delegation of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan gave a list of projects to be financed from the ECO Fund for Reconstruction of Afghanistan. The Afghanistan Government will convey the details of the projects through the diplomatic channels.

139. The Council supported the efforts of the Secretariat for participation in the reconstruction projects in Afghanistan and took note of the ongoing Feasibility Study for Rehabilitation of Nawar Bridge of Hesarak in Nangarhar Province of Afghanistan which has been assigned to ECO-Consultancy & Engineering Company (ECO-CEC) and requested the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan to provide necessary data to ECO-CEC, enabling it to prepare the study at the earliest and implement the project.

140. The Council also took note of another Feasibility Study for the Construction of Canal Crossings in Farah Province of Afghanistan for an amount of US\$ 23,095, which will be financed through ECO Feasibility Fund, presently under consideration by CPR. The RPC requested the Secretariat to finalize the details of this study with the approval of CPR.

141. The Council, in accordance with the provisions of the Plan, also asked the Secretariat and the Government of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan to identify/select projects (other than feasibility studies) on case-by-case basis in sectors such as transport & communications, energy, power supply, sewerage, health as well as training of Afghan officials to be implemented through the ECO Feasibility Fund with the endorsement of the CPR.

142. The Council discussed the updated compilation of the list of ECO projects including those requiring feasibility study in 2005 from the member states and evaluation of such projects as high, medium and low and asked the Secretariat to follow up the future course of action identified by the member states in respect of each project. The Council requested the member states to consider the new projects shown in the list of projects which are empty shell and need to be beefed up with details by the member states so that some projects profiles may be prepared for submission to international donors.

143. The Council expressed its thanks to the Secretariat to circulate a consolidated report on the implementation of the UNDP projects in two phases and asked the member states to give their concrete proposals, if any, on the areas of cooperation in future as well.

144. The Council asked the member states to participate in the 3rd Conference on the Role of ECO-CEC in Development of the Member States to be hosted by ECO-CEC. The seminar will now be held in Lahore, Pakistan, and the dates are being finalized in consultation with ECO-CEC. The conference was scheduled to be held in 2004 but due to lack of interest by the member states had to be postponed.

145. The Council noted the development efforts of the ECO-CEC, which comprises companies from Iran, Pakistan and Turkey and called upon the remaining member states to encourage their business companies to join ECO-CEC as share-holders as soon as possible and as long as Pakistan's commercial laws permitted the expansion.

146. The Council reiterated its recommendations that ECO-CEC may be considered for the status of "Specialized Agency" and in this connection agreed with the Secretariat's Legal Adviser's opinion to send this case to the Council of Ministers for approval.

147. The Council recommended if ECO-CEC could offer short-term training courses with local hospitality to the relevant experts from Afghanistan, Azerbaijan and Central Asian Republics member countries in the fields of highways, transportation, dams, power generation and transmission engineering.

148. The Council, keeping in view the amount accumulated in the ECO Feasibility Fund, asked the member states as well as the ECO Secretariat's Directorates to propose studies for ECO projects in important areas to be financed by the ECO Feasibility Fund.

149. The Council appreciated the publication of Directory of training and research institutions and the Roster of leading experts and consultants from the member states. The Council asked the member states who have not conveyed the information to the Secretariat with regard to both the publications to do so and urged the Secretariat to update the information for circulation among the member states at the earliest.

150. While appreciating the arrangements made for the training of ECO Secretariat Staff and participants from member states by UNESCAP trainers in "Participatory Project Design Based on the Logical Framework Approach" which has tentatively been scheduled for April 17-21, 2005 at the ECO Secretariat, the Council asked the member states to participate actively in this course.

f) Economic Research & Statistics

151. The Council expressed its satisfaction over the Secretariat's efforts to implement para 116 of its 14th meeting report and appreciated the summary assessment providing snapshots of the macro-economic developments including Human Development Indices and future prospects, particularly in each ECO member state, and generally in the ECO region, which was given as part of the working paper. The Council further requested the Secretariat to continue the preparation of such reports as part of its working paper for the future RPC meetings.

152. The Council noted with appreciation the contribution of the Directorate by preparing analytical and policy oriented reports/research on issues related to the region's socio-economic progress for various ECO summits/meetings, ECO News Bulletins and ECO Website.

153. While recalling the decision of the 8th ECO Summit, which stressed the expediency of intensification of ECO activities in the field of economic researches and statistics, the Council noted the draft ECO Framework of Cooperation and the Plan of Action in Statistics prepared by the Directorate and requested the member states to convey their views/comments as soon as possible so that the same could be discussed in the meeting of National Focal Points on Economic Research & Statistics to be held in due course.

154. In view of the said Framework, the Council underlined that regional cooperation in statistics should be intensified and guided by principles of practical utility, quality, transparency, and accessibility, in conformance with international standards, while still ensuring confidentiality. In order to ensure the production and improvement of statistics that are needed for the ECO decision bodies and cooperation activities, the Council urged the member states to intensify their cooperation activities according to the strategic thrusts identified in the said Plan of Action on Statistics.

155. The Council requested the ECO Secretariat to provide needed secretariat support to implement the ECO Framework of Cooperation in Statistics. The Council asked the member states to cooperate with the Secretariat to ensure that appropriate activities and projects are developed for effective implementation, monitoring, and review of the said Plan of Action on Statistics. The Council further requested that the progress of implementation of Plan of Action will be reviewed by the member states at least annually through communications with the Secretariat.

156. The Council appreciated the work of the Secretariat with regard to implementation of the decisions/recommendations of RPCs and preparing separate draft country-wise statistic bulletins for Azerbaijan, Kyrgyzstan, and Turkey. The Council asked the Secretariat to prepare such reports in respect of other member states with their consent, for circulation among the member states, as soon as possible. The Council also requested the Secretariat to prepare a comprehensive ECO Statistical Year Book containing the data from all member states on receipt of required information from all member states.

157. The Council reminded the member states to cooperate and provide the requisite material to the Secretariat for compilation and updating of ECO Annual Economic Reports.

158. 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 2003 presenting the most current available economic, financial, and social data on the ECO member countries during 1996-2002 and pasting the same on the 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 Secretariat in close collaboration with 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 on its Website.

159. Cognizant of the importance of the UN Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), the Council welcomed the plan of the Secretariat to embark on a feasible regional project plan attributable to ECO Feasibility Fund in collaboration with member states, United Nations agencies and Funds, the World Bank, IMF, and OECD preferably by May 2005 for monitoring progress of ECO countries towards the achievements and challenges of the MDGs. The Council also requested the member states to send progress report on their achievements and challenges for the MDGs to ECO Secretariat. The Council further advised the ECO Secretariat to include regional seminars/workshops on MDGs in the said project plan in association with relevant international organizations and requested the member states to actively participate in those events.

160. The Council reiterated its earlier calls on the significance of measuring the non-observed economy in the ECO region and requested the member states to consider organization of a regional workshop on the subject in collaboration with the ECO Secretariat and other relevant international organizations, which would also be allied with the member states' work plan in measurement of NOE.

161. The Council welcomed the Secretariat's attempts to prepare a Human Development Report for the ECO region. While the Council took note of the fact that UNDP is in process of preparation of a regional Human development report including ECO countries, advised the Secretariat to take necessary measures, in consultation with UNDP for preparation of a special ECO Human Development Report for future probably in 2006.

162. The Council recalled the member states to provide inputs including list of relevant research institutes for Secretariat's efforts in providing regular news/information concerning important macroeconomic and sectoral performance of the ECO region and promote regional information needs through electronic information port at its website.

163. The Council took note of the efforts seriously pursued by the Directorate within its capabilities and requested the member states to concretize expression of their support in more tangible form to enable the Directorate accomplish its mandate. The Council further agreed to (i) pay more attention to the hosting of activities related to the mandate of this Directorate, particularly those who had not yet hosted the meeting of NFPs; (ii) suggest the staff of the Directorate to undertake field visits to some of the NFPs of the member states to promote effective information exchange and cooperation and arrange training facilities, subject to the approval of CPR. Moreover, arrangements of the training facilities to the Directorate staff could be explored in consultation with the relevant authorities of the member states; (iii) recommend the Secretariat to strengthen human resources as well as technical capacity of the Directorate including Information Communication Technology (ICT) techniques aimed at facilitating the meetings of NFPs; and (iv) advise the Secretariat to give more priority to Directorate's staff to attend regional and international meetings, in the related areas, to familiarize themselves with regional/international

programmes/projects, subject to the approval of CPR. The Council urged the Secretariat to report to CPR the findings and results of field visits and the regional and international meetings attended.

164. The Council expressed its regrets that the 5th NFPs meeting which was very important event had not been held since 2002. The Council strongly appealed those member countries, who had not hosted the NFPs meeting so far, with financial support of the ECO Secretariat, to consider hosting the same and inform the Secretariat accordingly. The Council further agreed that if no member state voluntarily hosts the event then this meeting may be held on the sidelines of the next RPC meeting.

165. The Council hereupon advised the Secretariat to focus on three research projects proposals identified under ECO Joint Economic Research Programme which are doable both for the ECO Secretariat and coordinating leading research institutes from Iran, Kazakhstan and Turkey.

166. The Council took note of the emerging developments and trends towards greater globalization and increasing interdependence of economies which present challenges and opportunities for ECO member states and requested that the topic of globalization should be placed on the agenda of the next NFPs meeting for detailed deliberations. The Council agreed on the thematic topic “Importance of the Statistical Data and Economic Research in Strengthening the Economic Cooperation in the ECO Region” for discussion by the 16th RPC meeting.

g) ECO Regional Institutions and Specialized Agencies

167. The Council reiterated its earlier call to the Republic of Azerbaijan, Republic of Kazakhstan, Republic of Turkey and Turkmenistan to ratify the Charter of the ECO Cultural Institute. The Council invited Kyrgyz Republic and Republic of Uzbekistan, the non-signatory member states, to consider acceding to the Charter of the ECO Cultural Institute (ECI). The Council also requested all the signatory member states to actively participate in the activities/meetings of the Institute.

168. The Council took note of the preparation of the 3-Year Plan of Action of the ECI. The Council requested the member states signatory to ECI Charter to participate in the Third Meeting of its Board of Trustees to be hosted by the Islamic Republic of Pakistan on 12-13 April 2005. The member states except Republic of Azerbaijan, I.R. of Iran, I.R. of Pakistan and Republic of Turkey are requested to provide their views/comments on the Plan of Action.

169. The Council also requested the member states to take necessary steps to ensure timely remittance of their share of contributions to the ECI budget. The Council requested the Islamic Republic of Pakistan to expedite the process of appointment of the Executive Director of ECI to the Secretariat. The Council highlighted the importance of recruiting the qualified personnel in ECI and attracting the funds from other sources for efficient and effective implementation of its Action Plan.

170. The Council urged the member states which have not ratified the Charter of the ECO Science Foundation to do so. The Council requested the member states to provide views/comments on the modified Charter and basic documents. In this regard, the Council recommended that an Expert Group may finalize the modified Charter and the Basic Documents before the First BOT Meeting. The Council requested the Islamic Republic of Pakistan to announce the dates for holding the first BOT Meeting of the Foundation as early as possible.

171. The Council reiterated its earlier call for expeditious completion of ratification formalities of the Charter of the ECO Educational Institute. The Council requested the Republic of Turkey to announce the dates for holding the First Meeting of the BOT of the Institute to bring the Institute into existence. 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.

172. The Council welcomed the recommendations of the Eminent Persons Group (EPG) for the establishment of a Working Group to facilitate the transition of the ECO College of Insurance into ECO College of Business Administration and requested the ECO Secretariat to convene the meeting of the Working Group as early as possible so that it would submit its recommendations to CPR prior to the next Meeting of the Council of Ministers (COM). The Council also took note the expanded activities of the College which cover areas of studies in its syllabus and encouraged the member states to take part in its academic programmes.

173. The Council acknowledged the activities of the ECO Supreme Audit Institutions (ECOSAI) in the field of audit especially, holding of regular meetings of Governing Board and Assembly and its plan for training courses and launching of website. The Council requested the member states to participate in the next meeting of ECOSAI to be held in Baku in April 2005.

174. The Council recommended to convene the Meeting of the Senior Officials of the Higher Education Institutions of the Member States to discuss cooperation in the field of education, science and technology and to facilitate the establishment of Science Foundation and Educational Institute with the technical and financial assistance of the international organizations such as UNESCO, UNDP, UNESCAP referring to the UN Millennium Goals for realization of these goals in ECO region. The Council also appreciated the Secretariat's ongoing consultations with relevant UN Agencies in this regard.

Drug Control

175. The Council appreciated the activities carried out by the DCCU namely Workshops on Drug Demand/Supply Reduction and Meetings of the National Focal Points of the DCCU during the year 2004 in collaboration with UNODC and with financial support of European Union.

176. The Council took note of the integration of the DCCU into the Secretariat and requested the member states to provide full support to the Secretariat in order to implement the ECO Plan of Action on Drug Control and the task given by the 8th ECO Summit. The Representative of the Islamic Republic of Iran informed the meeting that IR of Iran has requested European Union to support DCCU for technical and financial assistance. The Representative of UNODC informed the Council that UNODC is ready to work closely to further enhance its cooperation with ECO for drug control activities.

177. The Council asked the Secretariat to approach UNODC and other international/regional organizations for obtaining technical/financial assistance to carry out the drug related activities enshrined in the ECO Plan of Action on Drug Control and task given by the leaders of the Member States at the 8th ECO Summit in Dushanbe.

178. The Council welcomed the offer of the Islamic Republic of Iran to host First ECO Interior Ministers Meeting on 18-20 April 2005 in Tehran in order to provide guidelines on drug control, combating organized crimes, money-laundering, harmonization of the legal structure etc. The Council requested the member states to participate in the Meeting at the Ministerial level.

179. The Council recommended the establishment of ECO Regional Training Center as mentioned in the ECO Plan of Action on Drug Control in order to conduct all kind of training courses/workshops for officials of drug control agencies of the member states. The Council appreciated the readiness of TADOC of the Republic of Turkey to act as the ECO Regional Training Center.

180. The Council urged the member states to continue organizing regular training programmes on both drug supply and drug demand reduction by taking the maximum advantage of TADOC in Turkey and training institutions of other member states. The Council also recommended the member states to provide training and technical assistance to the special anti-narcotics forces of Islamic Republic of Afghanistan involved in eradication of narcotic drugs.

181. The Council asked the member states to have a feedback on the Evaluation Report of the ECO-UNODC Project on DCCU which was circulated by the ECO Secretariat, as early as possible.

International Relations

182. The Council also appreciated signing of Memoranda of Understanding (MOUs) with the UN Environmental Programme (UNEP) and World Meteorological Organization (WMO) in August 2004 and December 2004 respectively and the proposal to sign MOU with ASEAN.

183. The Council took note of the meetings of Secretary General of ECO with the heads of international/regional organizations during the year 2004 on different occasions to promote relations with international/regional organizations and UN bodies. The Council requested the Secretary General to further promote and strengthen cooperative relationship with those organizations which ECO signed Memoranda of Understandings (MOUs).

184. The Council requested the ECO Contact Groups in international organizations for image building of ECO and also attracting the assistance of these institutions for ECO plans and projects.

185. The Council noted that participation of ECO in all international events should be result-oriented. The Council requested the Secretariat to reconsider the status of already signed MOUs and prioritize them within a framework of an action plan for their implementation.

Agenda Item No.7

Annual ECO Calendar of Events/Meetings for 2005-2006

186. The Council considered the draft ECO Calendar of Events and Meetings for 2005 and 2006, prepared by the Secretariat in various sectors. The Council finalized the Calendar for its submission to the 15th Meeting of the ECO Council of Ministers (COM) for approval. A copy of the Calendar is placed at *Annex-VI*.

187. The Council urged all the member states to ensure their participation at appropriate level in the scheduled events.

Agenda Item No. 8

Any other Business

188. No issue was raised under this agenda item.

Agenda Item No. 9

Date and Venue of the next Meeting

189. No member states expressed readiness to host the 16th meeting of RPC. The Secretariat would work out about the dates and the venue of the meeting and convey through diplomatic channels to the member states.

Agenda Item No. 10

Adoption of the Report

190. The Report of the 15th meeting of the Regional Planning Council (RPC) was adopted unanimously.

Agenda Item No. 11

Vote of Thanks

191. 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.

192. 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 appreciated the efforts made by the Secretary General and his staff for preparing comprehensive Working Papers and other documents for the Council.