

## The 14<sup>th</sup> RPC Meeting

### Statement by Mr. Sanaullah the ECO Acting Secretary General to the 14th RPC

( Istanbul, 04-06 December, 2003 )

*Annex-III*

*Honourable Ministers,  
Excellencies,  
Distinguished Delegates,  
Ladies & Gentlemen*

For the first time in the history of ECO, the Regional Planning Council is meeting without a Secretary General of ECO. This is an unusual situation. Nevertheless, three Deputy Secretaries General are here to fill this vacuum with the hope that soon the new Secretary General from the Republic of Kazakhstan would assume his honourable assignment.

We consider the RPC meeting as the most important event for ECO. It charts its year round activities designed to realize the directives and decisions of COMs, Summits and CPRs. Over the next three days, Senior Officials and high level experts will evaluate the progress achieved in the implementation of ECO programmes, plans of action and projects across all sectors since the last RPC held in Tehran (April 2003) for approval by the 14<sup>th</sup> COM in Dushanbe next year. We are hopeful and confident that these discussions will be focused and business like.

On behalf of ECO I would like to welcome all the participating delegates in Istanbul, the city renowned for its mystic history and beguiling beauty. Our warm gratitude goes to the Government of the Republic of Turkey for the traditional hospitality extended to all of us since arrival here.

On behalf of the Secretary General, the Secretariat has already presented a detailed activity report vide Note No.SG/RPC/14<sup>th</sup>/2003/2 dated November 12, 2003 which is expected to be discussed under Agenda item 5. Therefore, I would keep this statement brief.

ECO has gradually moved from establishing institutional structure to real projects and realization of concrete plans of action. For instance, the 2<sup>nd</sup> ECO Ministerial meeting on Commerce/Foreign Trade held in Islamabad on July 15-17, 2003 signed ECOTA approving the forward looking framework for reduction of tariffs within a maximum period of 15 years for the Transitional Islamic State of Afghanistan and 8 years for others. Widely hailed as a landmark development this agreement will closely knit the economies of the region and open, in a concrete manner, a way to integrate the region with global markets. Another important event has been the agreement of the member states to establish a High Level Marine Experts Group with a mandate to improve multimodal transshipment from transit development countries to ECO landlocked states and vice versa.

I am pleased to inform you that action is also at hand to implement the decision of the 13<sup>th</sup> COM to set up an Eminent Persons Group (EPG) to improve efficiency and effectiveness of ECO. EPG will have to grapple with issues which are extensive in substance as well as in number. We are really grateful to the member states for appointing persons who are familiar with

the working of international organizations and eminently qualified to assess the current ECO projects and plans. RPC being one of the most important decision making organ, may wish to suggest some points for consideration by the Eminent Persons. The 1<sup>st</sup> meeting of EPG will take place shortly in Tehran.

During the last RPC, the Secretariat circulated a comprehensive review of the ECO events planned by the successive RPC meetings since 1998, highlighting the number of implemented events with level of participation from each member state. RPC while assessing the Calendar of Events for 2003 and 2004 could not reach the consensus recommendation for approval of the same by COM. As a result, the Calendar of Events remained fluid till approved recently by CPR on behalf of COM. In all, ECO had proposed 71 ECO events and was able to implement only 12 of them and out of 28 non-ECO events 20 were implemented.

In view of the delayed approval of annual activities last year, the current RPC is kindly requested to look at the proposed Calendar of Events for 2004-2005 in the light of utility and productivity of each event for realization of the main ECO objectives. A focused and project oriented approach in our view would be better and only those events which support this strategy merit approval. On our behalf, we have come up with a list of around 72 ECO and 12 non-ECO events. Majority of these events have been proposed by the member states at Experts Level meetings. We look up to the member states to decide the optimal number of events in both categories, especially in view of the non-implementation of the approved ECO events in recent past.

Before I move on to the sectoral achievements, I would like to inform you that due to a combination of many factors we will not be able to hold the Ministerial meeting on Finance and Economics this year. Nevertheless we are optimistic that we will hold the 1<sup>st</sup> Ministerial meeting on Information and Communication Technology (ICT) as scheduled this month in Tehran. Of late, the response from the member states has become encouraging.

We remain hopeful that the Ministerial meetings which, for some reasons cannot be held this year, will take place in 2004. In this case, we will have a heavy schedule for the next year with four Ministerial meetings namely a) 5<sup>th</sup> Ministerial meeting on Transport and Communications in Kyrgyz Republic b) 2<sup>nd</sup> Ministerial meeting on Energy in Islamic Republic of Iran (January). c) 1<sup>st</sup> Ministerial meeting on Industry again in the Islamic Republic of Iran (January) and d) the 3<sup>rd</sup> Ministerial meeting on Commerce/Foreign Trade in Republic of Turkey.

Briefly I would like to visit the sectoral activities now to see where do we stand vis-à-vis the last year's programmes and to what extent we have been able to come up to the expectations of the member states in this respect:

In the field of **Trade and Investment**, the major achievement, as stated earlier, has been made, within the framework of reducing tariff and dismantling non-tariff barriers. This relates to signing of ECOTA which will certainly play a proactive role in the development of intra-regional trade. ECOTA is comprehensive in terms of commodity coverage. Implemented gradually over eight years, it will scale down the existing tariffs to a maximum of 15% on 80% of the goods traded in ECO region.

Within the same sector, the 1<sup>st</sup> ECO Investment Conference, held on February 17-18, 2003, generated keen interest among the business communities of the member states who expressed the desire to institutionalize this forum. In this regard, the Transitional Islamic State of Afghanistan has offered to host the 2<sup>nd</sup> Conference on Regional Investment in Kabul in the 1<sup>st</sup> quarter of the next year.

Also, I would like to inform that on the conclusion of the ECO-ITC project, a new phase of the project is under consideration. Already, ECO has received a draft proposal from ITC which has been submitted to the member states and this needs to be evaluated on the basis of the outcome of the previous ECO-ITC programme in the context of its impact on intra-regional trade.

Within ECO, we are constantly engaged in making the ECO Chamber of Commerce and Industry (ECO-CCI) realize that we want them as a partner to promote regional trade. No intra governmental organization can ensure genuine and effective regional cooperation without the participation of the private sector. Therefore we seriously seek the indulgence of the member states to activate ECO-CCI. Also, we need to establish, as early as possible, the ECO Trade and Development Bank to help ECO to pursue a project-oriented development strategy.

In the 2<sup>nd</sup> priority sector of **Transport and Communications**, we have been able to operate regular container train service on fortnightly basis from Istanbul to Almaty. We are now grappling with real issues such as inadequacy of empty containers, lack of common agreed tariffs, technical and procedural coordination among the concerned railways operators.

We have mixed results with regard to a similar venture for the carriage of passengers. The technical problems in our way to launch the passenger train on the same route have been resolved and now we look up to the Republic of Uzbekistan to redeem its assurances to allow the proposed train to transit through its territory.

This year we were able to schedule a high level meeting in the Marine Transportation in line with the decisions of the 4<sup>th</sup> Ministerial meeting on Transport and Communications. Now we hope that the forthcoming Ministerial meeting on ICT (Information Communication Technology) would promote wider application of IT based specialized programmes to develop an efficient transit transport system in the region.

We have already agreed to remove the inconsistency between our two transit documents namely TTA and TTFA by adopting TTFA as the primary transit document for ECO. Still we need to focus in real time frame on the ratification of TTFA to make it operational, soonest possible.

The member states, on priority, are requested to construct the important missing rail and road links for success of our ECO programmes. In this context, the Secretariat requests briefing on regular basis.

The multimodal transportation study with the help of IDB is at an advance stage of implementation and may require some financial assistance from the SS Fund to arrange the down-stream activities to ensure completion of the project.

In the third priority area of **Energy, Minerals and Environment**, the Plan of Action and recommendations approved by the 1<sup>st</sup> Ministerial meeting continue to receive favourable response from UNEP in terms of technology transfer. The member states are now requested to help the ECO Secretariat with proposals to devise ways how to benefit from the UNEP's positive outlook.

In collaboration with IDB, we are still working on the selection of a Consultant for the IDB-ECO Feasibility Study on the ECO Countries' Power System Inter-connection. We consider this project important and feel that it will generate many sub-programmes and activities offering opportunities to harness the available energy resources in the region. To promote further development in the Energy sector, the 2<sup>nd</sup> Ministerial meeting on Energy/Petroleum will be held in Tehran in near future. By then, the Power System Inter-Connection study project will hopefully be initiated.

The programme for strengthening regional cooperation in the sector of **Environment and Minerals** has been agreed by the member states. But, I feel that in this important area, more focus is needed to implement the proposed workshops and meetings. We expect that the member states would keep the Secretariat posted on the national developments with regard to the Environment Plan of Actions.

The follow-up activities emerging from the decisions of the 1<sup>st</sup> ECO Ministerial meeting on Agriculture are taking place as planned. These activities will, no doubt, in due course will provide a common vision to achieve sustainable agricultural development in the region. Under the Technical Cooperation Programme (TCP) signed with FAO, many useful events have been scheduled.

The 2nd Ministerial meeting on Agriculture will take place in 2004 in Turkey and we believe that it will give a real boost to the development of Agriculture and Food Security Situation in the region. This sector, given the predominant dependence of the national economies of ECO member states on Agriculture, needs to be given more attention and focus in the ECO Secretariat's work.

Our achievements in the fields of **Industry, Health, Population and Tourism** have not been substantive. Nevertheless, we have now initiated some meetings, as well as workshops in these sectors. This year, we had workshops on Privatization and Development of SMEs. The 1<sup>st</sup> ECO Ministerial meeting on Industry in January 2004 in Tehran will definitely give the necessary guidance and support for coordinated regional strategy in the manufacturing sector.

Bishkek COM approved institutionalization of Ministerial meetings in the new area of Finance and Economics within the permanent activities of ECO. This area is, no doubt, important and crucial for success of our regional cooperation. We hope that RPC would give an unqualified support to the scheduling of the first meeting, positively in the 1<sup>st</sup> quarter of 2004.

The Directorate of Project Research and the Directorate of Research and Statistics have done some useful work. I would like to highlight the contributions of the Directorate of Project Research with respect to ECO's participation in the reconstruction work in Afghanistan. With the support of ECO-CEC, we have been able to come up with some projects for carrying out pre-feasibility studies to be funded by ECO sources. However, despite best efforts, the proposed ECO Fund for reconstruction of Afghanistan could not be actualized so far.

*Excellencies,*

Within the international community, we have consolidated our ongoing cooperative relations with IDB, UNESCAP, UNCTAD, FAO, ASEAN, Colombo Plan, ITC, World Bank, SMJD, IRU, UNESCO, WTO and UNEP. Also, we have signed MoU with the World Customs Organization the Colombo Plan and the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE).

It may not be out of place to mention that the 8<sup>th</sup> Consultative meeting between the Executive Heads of four Regional Organizations and UNESCAP was held at the Secretariat under the auspices of ECO. Each participating organization hailed ECO for the excellent arrangements and its contributions. The Secretary General, as usual, participated in the informal COM at New York, and the Joint ECO-ASEAN Ministerial meeting there.

In 2003, we have also witnessed the increasing interest of our member states in ECO Specialized Agencies and Regional Institutions, particularly the ECO College of Insurance, ECO Chamber of Commerce, ECO Shipping Company and ECO Cultural Institute. In my humble view, some of these institutions are in greater need than intention or interest by the member states for carrying out their stated objectives or survival as functional entities. Some representatives of ECO affiliated bodies are present here. We welcome them whole-heartedly.

Also, I would like to say that the Drug Control Coordination Unit has been working effectively, in collaboration with national focal points.

*Excellencies and Distinguished Guests,*

Please allow me to reiterate our warm gratitude for your presence at this august gathering. Our sincerest thanks go to HE the Minister of State and the Deputy Prime Minister, Associated Professor Dr. Abdillatif Sener for gracing the occasion with his presence and a policy statement which will, no doubt, guide our deliberations.

Finally, I would like to say with pride that the ECO staff is pleased to see that one of its very able former Deputy Secretary General, H.E. Dr. Tiktik has been entrusted the responsibility to lead the deliberations of this RPC. Dr. Tiktik's deep knowledge of ECO, the understanding of its priorities and the experience of working with majority of the people present here will definitely ensure re-orientation of our discussions to promote a development bound ECO strategy, rather than stretching its mandate too thin and too ineffective. We value our association with him and his commitment to the overall ECO objectives.

Thank you for patient hearing.

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