

The 13th RPC Meeting

The Statement of H. E. Mr. Tahmasb Mazaheri, Minister of Economic Affairs and Finance

of the Islamic Republic of Iran at the Inaugural ceremony of the 13th RPC

(Tehran, 20-22 April, 2003)

Annex-I

In the Name of Allah

*Honorable guests
Distinguished delegates
Ladies & Gentlemen*

It is a great pleasure for me to meet once again my dear colleagues and friends from the ECO Member States on the occasion of RPC. While welcoming the honorable delegates, I wish a pleasant stay for all of you. RPC is a good opportunity for relevant authorities to come together and find practical approaches to realize the goals of the Organization.

Although the 13th RPC is going to be held with delay but I hope that our deliberations during the meeting would led to positive results in line with the realization of the aims of ECO.

Dear Participants,

The 13th RPC is held in a situation that the strategic region of Middle East is facing a chaotic condition due to the presence of alien forces. I hope that by withdrawal of these forces and establishment of a people based government in Iraq, peace and normal conditions would come back to the region and the condition would be proper for economic and trade activities.

Distinguished guests,

In the 3rd Millenium, economic globalization provides new challenges and opportunities on the way of economic development of the developing countries. These countries in order to exploit the opportunities and overcome the globalization challenges. Nowadays regional cooperation is one of the most proper ways to overcome these challenges on the way of development.

Fortunately, the unique geographical and geopolitical position of the region, as well as the strong cultural and historical ties of the people in the region, also the rich human and natural resources all gathered in one organization with two decades of experience, provided a proper ground for regional cooperation among the Member States. Therefore it is necessary to double our efforts to realize the potentials of our region. This requires negotiation and reaches a regional understanding, as well as coordinating the national projects in line with the aims of regional cooperation.

ECO in its first decade of operation as a matter of intra and inter regional functions to gain the aims set forward by Treaty of Izmir, has achieved a lot through signing many agreements, establishing specialized regional institutions and outlining the cooperation priorities of the Members in the fields of Trade, Transportation and Energy.

It is expected that ECO after a decade of preparing the background would enter the era for development through exchange of view with all the members and gain a proper position in international trade and economics.

The success of the Organization in gaining the determined goals requires the effort of all members. The main confronting challenge of ECO is the missing coordination of national plans of the member states with multilateral plans of the organization. It is expected that the member states would coordinate their bilateral affairs based on the decisions of ECO.

RPC as a major pillar of the organization has the following roles and duties: providing plans, strategy and methods based on the principles of regional cooperation, biannual revision of the priorities, annual evaluation of the development of the projects, evaluation of the working conditions of the Secretariat, preparation of the annual economic report, etc. But still ECO has room for acting more actively.

Mr. Chairman, distinguished delegates

Six years ago ECO members understanding the necessity of expediting the trend for regional cooperation and prioritization of the goals realistically and in line with the global realities, determined the strategy for cooperation for ten years in the fields of trade, transportation and communications, and energy. Now after 5 years the need is deeply felt to revise the strategy base of the organization and find out the reasons why the aims are not reached and what are the obstacles on the way.

In our opinion the revision in the ECO affairs may be based on two major issues:

First, revision in the general approach of the Organization, considering the experiences of the other regional organizations and turn to software cooperation among the governments and in ECO activities, instead of hardware cooperation, in order to remove the obstacles.

Second revision of the previous projects and plans in order to achieve a real picture of the existing situation as a base for future plans. In this line the most important issue in front of us during the 13th RPC is determining the priority plans and setting goals for the future of ECO.

Mr. Chairman, Distinguished Delegates

It is necessary that this RPC negotiations would consider the guidelines of the Istanbul Declaration, the most important of which follows:

- Expansion of a secure and effective Transportation system with proper connection to international passages and implementation of the Plan of Action of the Decade of Transportation (1997-2007).
- Immediate implementation of TTA and TTFA to facilitate the effective transportation in the region and beyond.
- Immediate finalization and implementation of ECOTA to remove the non tariff barriers and gradual removal of tariffs based on a time frame to expand intra trade and upgrade the welfare of the people of the region, as well as expansion of trade beyond the region to gain proper portion of the international trade by ECO.
- Taking measures to strengthen cooperation of private sectors with ECO economic activities. Thus there should be trade meetings in the sideline of Summit Meetings and implementing the decisions of such meetings.
- Development in the Power Network Connection project of ECO Member States and implementation of ECO Plan of Action on Energy Cooperation (2001-2005).
- Taking measures by the Member States to reinforce the regional institutes of the organization, been operationalized previously.
- Cooperation in international trade to maintain a just economic system to meet the needs of the Member States and help them to be a member to WTO.
- Taking a regional approach to fight drug trafficking.
- Special attention to enable women in their cooperation with ECO affairs.
- More cooperation among the members on Environmental issues and trying to solve regional environmental issues and implementing ECO Plan of Action on Environment, approved by the 1st ECO Ministerial Meeting on Environment-Tehran.
- Implementation of Islamabad Declaration on Agricultural Cooperation.
- Sustained effort to strengthen and promote effectiveness of the Organization.

Also in order to prevent any recession in the activities of the Organization, the following issues are recommended:

1. Evaluation of the Strategy Document on Economic Cooperation. The Secretariat is requested to give recommendations based on conducted researches to Member States, with reference to the experiences of the last 5 years. What has been done so far in this regard is far from expectations.
2. Comparative analysis of the other regional organizations and exploiting their experiences. Secretariat may get the advice of the international consultants in this regard.
3. Preparing economic report of the region with emphasis on comprehensive analysis of the economic trend in the region and the completing items of economy in the Member States, as well as recommending realistically for economic cooperation among the Members.

4. Making group efforts and taking measures to implement the Plan of Action for cooperation among the Member States in the field of energy and exchange of information in this regard and to exploit the energy, oil and gas resources of the region.

Of course Secretariat has a great role in providing the Council with software assistance. It is expected that different Directorates of the Secretariat would contribute to the promotion and realization of the aims of the Organization, more than ever and be the research and software hand of the Member States.

At the end I hope that the Meeting would gain practical and beneficial results and would reach a new horizon to broaden the regional cooperation. Also I would like to thank H. E. Secretary General and the staff of the Secretariat for the arrangements and documentation of the Meeting.