

The 5th Ministerial Meeting on Transport & Communications

Report

(Cholpon-Ata/Kyrgyz Republic, 10-12 August, 2004)

The 5th ECO Ministerial meeting on Transport and Communications was held in Cholpon-Ata (Kyrgyz Republic) on 10-12 August, 2004. The meeting was attended by the delegations of the Transitional Islamic State of Afghanistan, Republic of Azerbaijan, Islamic Republic of Iran, Republic of Kazakhstan, Kyrgyz Republic, Islamic Republic of Pakistan, Republic of Tajikistan, Republic of Turkey and Republic of Uzbekistan. The ECO Secretariat's delegation headed by H.E. Mr. Askhat Orazbay, Secretary General and a representative from UNESCAP also attended the meeting. The list of the participants is placed at **Annex-I**.

Agenda Item No. 1

Inauguration of the Meeting

2. The meeting was inaugurated by H.E. Mr. Kubanychbek M. Jumaliev, First Vice Prime Minister and Minister of Transport and Communications of the Kyrgyz Republic by reading a message of H.E. Mr. Askar Akayev, the President of the Kyrgyz Republic. H.E. Mr. Askhat Orazbay, Secretary General of ECO expressed warm gratitude to the Government of the Kyrgyz Republic, particularly to the Ministry of Transport and Communications for hosting the 5th ECO Ministerial meeting in Cholpon-Ata and excellent arrangements for the meeting. The texts of both the inaugural statements are placed at **Annex-II**.

Agenda Item No. 2

Election of the Chairman

3. H.E. Mr. Kubanychbek M. Jumaliev, First Vice Prime Minister and Minister of Transport and Communications of the Kyrgyz Republic was unanimously elected as the Chairman of the meeting.

Agenda Item No. 3

Adoption of the Agenda

4. The Agenda of the meeting endorsed by the Senior Officials meeting held in Cholpon-Ata on August 10-11, 2004 was unanimously adopted which is attached at **Annex-III**.

Agenda Item No. 4

Appointment of the Drafting Committee

5. As per ECO practice, an open-ended Drafting Committee was appointed to prepare the report of the Meeting.

Agenda Item No. 5

Review of the implementation of decisions/recommendations of the previous meetings including:

- Railway and Road Maps;
- Shipping Company.

6. The representative of the ECO Secretariat presented a brief review report of the implementation of decisions/recommendations of the previous four ECO Ministerial meetings on Transport and Communications. He also presented a brief report on the status of the ECO Shipping Company and Road and Railway Network Maps. He further explained that the ECO Shipping Company, due to lack of support by the shareholders, is not functioning well and its fate very much depends on the urgent measures to be taken by the relevant countries. Therefore, he wished that the current Ministerial Meeting could make proper decision in this regard.

7. The Iranian delegation suggested that holding the meeting of the General Assembly of the Company to decide about the future of the Company is necessary at this critical moment. The said meeting may decide about the future of the Company. This idea was welcomed by the participating delegations.

8. With regard to the Railway and Road Maps after briefing the background on the issue the delegations decided to propose a final solution for these projects. The Iranian delegation suggested that based on the decisions of the 14th RPC meeting a High Level Experts meeting from the member states be held in Tehran in January 2005 hosted by the ECO Secretariat to discuss the ECO road map and make their final corrections. Based on the decisions of this meeting the Iranian authorities will prepare the final blue print of the ECO road map before printing the final maps. With regard to the railway map the Iranian delegation put the deadline of the end of year 2004 for receiving all corrections and comments of the member states for the ECO railway map and stressed that after the said deadline no corrections will be entertained and the Iranian relevant authorities will not take any responsibility for preparing the new railway map.

Agenda Item No. 6

National Reports on the implementation of the Programme of Action for the ECO Decade of Transport and Communications (1998-2007), including:

9. Under this agenda item the Heads of the participating delegations presented their reports on the implementation of the Programme of Action for the ECO Decade of Transport and Communications (1998-2007). The texts of the said reports are attached at **Annex-IV**.

10. The representative of UNESCAP, Mr. Barry Cable, Director of Transport and Tourism, presented a comprehensive report on the activities of UNESCAP in Asian transport. He explained that Asian Highway Agreement prepared by that organization has been signed by twenty six member countries including all ECO member states attending the Meeting. He stressed that operationalization of this agreement, which will come into force after ratification by eight member states, will help to identify the linking routes of the Asian countries and will explain the mechanism for modification of the roads. He stressed on the importance of ratification of TTFA as a basic ECO document which would facilitate transit transport and trade within the ECO region. He emphasized on the interest of UNESCAP to continue support and contribute to implementation of the ECO transport and communication projects. Mr. Cable informed that UNESCAP is planning to invite the Ministers of Transport and Communications of the ECO to attend a Conference of the Asian Ministers of Transport which will be held in Bangkok in year 2006. The report of UNESCAP representative is attached at **Annex-V**.

Agenda Item No. 7

Discussions on the major issues of transport and communications

11. Under this agenda item the meeting discussed the decisions and proposals made in previous meetings on monitoring and ensuring the smooth running of container and passenger trains on Trans-Asian Railway mainline. The meeting agreed that these two projects were considered to be among the most important projects within ECO transport and transit trade cooperation projects. That was the reason that the majority of the member states, regardless of being or not being located on this route, fully support and contribute to the implementation of these two projects.

12. The meeting agreed that despite the great importance of these two projects they have not been implemented the way the member states expected due to two impediments; the technical obstacles and national policies of some member states. It was agreed by the meeting that the technical obstacles may be overcome by support, cooperation and dedication of the member states through establishing Expert Working Groups meetings as it has been realized on recent endorsement of the MoU on ECO Railway Common Tariff Policy. Concerning the national policies the participating delegations stressed that this problem may not be solved unless the ECO member states would find a mechanism for a collective political appeal to the less interested member states namely Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan to actively support and contribute to implementation of these projects. The meeting wished that the current Ministerial Meeting would identify this mechanism and if found it proper to invite the Heads of Railways of

the member states to attend the next ECO Summit Meeting (September 14, 2004 in Dushanbe) to assist the highest authorities of the member states to make final decision on this issue.

13. On the status of the region-wide projects of transport and communications including missing road and railway links the participating delegations including Iran, Kazakhstan, Azerbaijan and Turkey explained their recent activities on construction and development of roads, railways and other physical links. The Kazakhstan delegation suggested to consider a new project i.e. the construction of Trans-Kazakhstan railway of the Europe standard (the gauge of 1435mm). This project will increase the capacity of Trans-continental corridors linking the Europe and Asian countries and has already enjoyed the support from the transport authorities of Iran, Turkey and China. The Chairman stressed that development of linking roads and railways by the ECO member states in their national projects is of great importance and the ECO Secretariat may play an important role in circulation of the information on development of the national projects to all member states provided that these information are conveyed to the Secretariat by the member states on time.

14. The meeting agreed that the endorsement of the MoU on Railway Tariff Policy by the 8th Meeting of the Heads of ECO Railway Authorities in Istanbul in July 2004 was an important development in removing the obstacles on the ECO railway transport network.

15. Despite the above success the participating delegations stressed that endorsing of the said MoU on railway tariffs may not be enough in solving the remaining tariff problems on ECO railway unless the member states would comply with the contents of the document and instruct their relevant administrations to harmonize their railway tariff policy with the said MoU.

16. Considering the Expert Working Group to fine-tune draft Action Plan for revitalizing and operating the China-Middle East Europe Corridor including the time framework for its execution, the meeting discussed the outcomes of the 1st EWG meeting in Tehran on May 9-10, 2004. The Secretariat informed the meeting that introducing nominees for establishment of a Working Group and its sub-groups to identify physical and non-physical impediments on operationalization of the said corridor by the member states has not been realized within the proposed deadline. In order to facilitate the procedure for establishing the said Working Group the Secretariat agreed to provide Terms of Reference for the functions of the said Group and convey the TORs to the member states as well as a date for convening the 1st meeting of the said Working Group. Based on the TORs and suggested date for convening the said Working Group by the Secretariat the member states would introduce their nominees for the Working Group at the earliest in order to facilitate implementation of the said project.

Agenda Item No. 8

Consideration of status of Transit Transport Framework Agreement (TTFA)

17. Considering the status of TTFA the Secretariat briefed the meeting on the latest development on this issue. He stressed that in the 4th Ministerial Meeting on Transport and Communication in Izmir the representatives of Kazakhstan and Turkey informed the meeting that the relevant authorities are processing the formalities of ratification of the said agreement. He further said that Kazakhstan officially informed the Secretariat that ratification of TTFA in Kazakhstan has been done and the Secretariat is expecting to receive the same information from the Republic of Turkey.

18. The Head of Turkish delegation informed the meeting that the ongoing ratification process for TTFA would be completed as soon as possible. The Chairman of the meeting stressed that the meeting fully supports early ratification of the said agreement and urged all delegations to appeal to their relevant authorities to accelerate ratification process of the Agreement.

Agenda Item No. 9

Deliberation of measures/actions in the field of road and sea transport

19. Under this agenda item the Secretariat briefed the meeting about the outcomes of the 1st Meeting of the Heads of Reference Marine Organizations in Tehran on October 2003 and stressed that there was a great potential for cooperation of the ECO member states on ports facilities and sea transportation.

20. The meeting agreed that the cooperation of the member states' marine organizations is an important initiative for multimodal transport operations in the ECO region especially for the landlocked countries.

21. The Secretariat informed the meeting that Turkey had agreed to host the 2nd Meeting of the Heads of Reference Marine Organizations in that country in last June. The Turkish delegation explained that due to coinciding the date of that meeting with some other important events in Turkey the relevant Turkish authorities were not able to organize the same meeting. He wished that the new date for holding the same meeting will be decided and conveyed to the Secretariat as soon as possible.

22. With regard to the existing physical and non-physical obstacles to road transportation in the region the Secretariat briefed the meeting with some joint projects with international organizations such as UNDP, UNCTAD, IDB and UNESCAP. He explained that part of the problem is related to the national policies within each member states' territory which should be overcome by the relevant authorities, while the other obstacles go to the border crossing points of the member states which should be identified by experts from the member states in cooperation with the international consultants.

23. The Chairman asked the member states to convey their information about the physical and non-physical obstacles to road transportation in their respective countries to the ECO Secretariat in order to help the Secretariat to initiate projects in cooperation with international organizations for removing the said obstacles.

Agenda Item No. 10

Review of implementation of the plan for Development of Telecommunications and Postal links in the ECO region

24. The meeting agreed that Trans-Asia-Europe Fiber Optical Cable System (TAEFOS) was the most important project in telecommunication cooperation of the ECO member states. The meeting expressed the wish for joining the remaining member states to this important telecommunication network. The Secretariat informed the meeting that Azerbaijan has agreed to hold the 4th TAEFOS meeting in October 2004.

25. The Secretariat stressed on the importance of the meetings of the Directors General of the ECO Telecommunication Companies which have had thirteen meetings so far and it was expected that the 14th meeting of the said Directors General would be held in the year 2003-2004 but due to lack of a volunteer host this meeting has not been materialized yet. Therefore, the Ministers asked the member states to consider hosting the said meeting and inform the Secretariat accordingly.

26. Concerning the postal cooperation of the ECO member states the outcome of the 1st meeting of ECO Postal Authorities in Kyrgyzstan in April 2004 was reviewed by the meeting and it was agreed that there was a good potential for expanding postal linkages among the ECO member states. The meeting was informed that 2nd meeting of ECO Postal Authorities will be held in Tehran in the Spring of 2005 in which the implementation of the decisions of the 1st meeting as well as the new initiatives for enhancement of the member states' cooperation in this field may be discussed.

Agenda Item No. 11

Date and Venue of the next meeting

27. The Ministers extended their thanks and welcomed the Iranian delegation for accepting to be the host of the 6th Ministerial Meeting of ECO Transport and Communication in Tehran in year 2005.

Agenda Item No. 12

Any other business

28. Nothing was discussed under this agenda item.

Agenda Item No.13

Vote of Thanks

29. The Minister of Transport and Communication of the Republic of Kazakhstan on behalf of the participating delegations expressed vote of thanks to the Government of Kyrgyz Republic in particular to the Ministry of Transport and Communications for extending warm hospitality to the participating delegations and making an excellent arrangement for the meeting.

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