

The 4th Ministerial Meeting on Transport & Communications

Report

(Izmir, Turkey 26-27 September, 2002)

The 4th ECO Ministerial meeting on Transport and Communications was held in Izmir (Turkey) on 26-27 September, 2002. The meeting was attended by the delegations of the Transitional Islamic Government 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. Ambassador Seyed Mojtaba Arastou, Secretary General and representatives from UNESCAP and UNCTAD 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. Professor Naci Kinacioglu, Minister of Transport of the Republic of Turkey. H.E. Ambassador Seyed Mojtaba Arastou, Secretary General of ECO expressed warm gratitude to the government of the Republic of Turkey, particularly to the Ministry of Transport for hosting the 4th ECO Ministerial meeting in Izmir and wished all the participants fruitful results on the issues highlighted in the agenda. The texts of both the inaugural statements are placed at **Annex-II**.

Agenda Item No. 2

Election of the Chairman

3. H.E. Professor Naci Kinacioglu, Minister of Transport of the Republic of Turkey 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 Izmir on 24-25 September, 2002 was adopted which is placed 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.

Agenda Item No. 5

Review of the implementation of decisions/recommendations of the previous Ministerial meetings

6. The representative of the ECO Secretariat presented a brief review report of the implementation of decisions/recommendations of the previous three ECO Ministerial meetings on Transport and Communications. Reference was made to the follow up report on the same subject circulated by the ECO Secretariat on August 24, 2002.

7. The meeting expressed satisfaction over the achievements of the Organization in this sector, highlighting the important initiatives undertaken since the 3rd ECO Ministerial meeting. The member states were requested to continue their support for early implementation of the agreed decisions and recommendations of the previous meetings.

8. A representative of the Republic of Turkey underlined the importance of the ECO Road and Railway Network maps as it was linked with the completion of many other ECO projects including the Directory on the ECO Road Network. The Islamic Republic of Iran was called upon to take stock of general view points of all member states through ECO Secretariat and provide the second edition of the blue-print, as soon as possible. Member states may then take into consideration the international standards for the indication of roads and other data to be put on the map.

9. The meeting discussed the present and future potential of the ECO Shipping Company on the basis of the information presented by the Managing Director of this company. In view of the reduced financial support from the signatory countries, some delegations proposed that only the participating states who had paid equity share should be authorized to decide upon the affairs of the Company. The representative of the Islamic Republic of Iran proposed that in case of non-contribution from the signatory states, the participating countries i.e. Islamic Republic of Pakistan and Islamic Republic of Iran would be prepared to convert the said company into a joint venture under the same title with the possibility of re-joining by ECO member states at a later stage, if considered appropriate. The delegations of the signatory member states endorsed the Iranian proposal.

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:

10. The Heads of delegations presented their national reports on the implementation of the Programme of Action for the ECO Decade of Transport and Communications (1998-2007) which are placed at **Annex-IV**. In their statements the honourable Ministers/Heads of delegations underlined the development in their respective countries since the 3rd ECO Ministerial meeting on Transport and Communications as well as expressing happiness over the launching of the regular container train and the pilot run of the International passenger train on Almaty-Tashkent-Turkmenabad-Tehran-Istanbul route of the Trans Asian railway main line.

11. The meeting was informed by the ECO Secretariat on the recent works carried out to run the demonstration container train on the Almaty-Tashkent-Tehran-Istanbul route as well as the existing significant problems/obstacles being faced during the realization of this project. The meeting noted with appreciation the work carried out by the concerned Directorate with the active support of the member states, in particular the Turkish State Railways, and taking into account its important role in the development of transportation on Trans-Asian Railway route, decided to urge the concerned authorities of member states to finalize all pending matters including tariffs and to take further

actions for the smooth running of the container trains on regular basis along the Trans Asian Railway main line of the East-West transport corridor.

12. Earlier the representative of the ECO Secretariat highlighted the projects having region-wide importance. In this connection, he underscored the need for:

- a. early completion of the missing road and railway links particularly the construction of the Kerman-Zahidan railway line, bye-pass of the Lake Van of the East-West transport corridor, Bafq-Meshhad of the North-South transport corridor. The delegation of Pakistan expressed serious concern on non-completion of the missing links between Kerman-Zahidan and the non-construction of Chaman-Kandahar-Herat-Ghuzhgy railway line. The Iranian delegation observed that the Kerman-Zahidan link would be completed in the year 2006. The completion of the said link and Bafq-Meshhad railway line could be expedited if the financial support were to be made available from the International agencies or interested member states. In this regard, the ECO Secretariat was requested to seek funding for the construction of these missing links from international donor agencies. The Turkish delegation informed the meeting about the latest stage of the Bosphorus tube crossing for railway connection which will provide an uninterrupted link between Europe and Asia. The meeting supported the proposal of the representative of the Kyrgyz Republic to include the railway project involving China, Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan in the Programme of Action for the ECO Decade of Transport and Communications (1998-2007).
- b. increase of the traffic capacity of the Trans-Asian Railway main line and the relevant border stations, particularly Sarakhs (Iranian) railway station as well as to extend subsidiary rail tracks at the railway stations of the Islamic Republic of Iran and the Republic of Turkey in accordance with the technical parameters of the Annex-III to TTFA. The Iranian delegation informed the meeting that the capacity of the Sarakhs (Iranian) railway station would be doubled by the end of this year.
- c. expansion of the intra-regional telecommunications and postal services among ECO member states. In this regard, the representative of Transitional Islamic government of Afghanistan proposed laying ring optical fiber cable for the country, and beyond, connecting Afghanistan to the ECO member countries. Since the meeting of the Heads of member states will be held soon further details of the project will be given to the ECO Secretariat. In phase-I it was informed that the optical fiber cable would connect Peshawar, Jalalabad, Kabul, Kandahar, Herat, Meshhad and in phase-II Kabul, Mazar-i-Sharif, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan and back to Herat. The Islamic Republics of Iran and Pakistan agreed to connect Peshawar-Kabul-Herat-Meshhad by Fiber Optic Cable as the shortest route to the TAEFOS.

13. The meeting appealed to the governments of the member states to consider the adoption of a common transit tariff for the container train from Almaty to Istanbul on the Trans-Asian railway main line to make it commercially more attractive for the shippers/consignees. Also in this regard the member states were requested to review the visa policy particularly facilitating the granting of visa at reduced rates to the drivers as well as to other nationals of ECO member states.

14. The delegation of the Republic of Turkey proposed for consideration the following:

- i. to take technical and administrative measures for realizing international postal and postal payment services on reciprocal basis and necessary measures to provide the existing mails to be exchanged regularly and rapidly among the member states;
- ii. to provide the postal services personnel of member states with mutual visits and information exchange and carrying out training activities by organizing apprenticeship, meetings and seminars;
- iii. to issue common stamps among the member states, organizing common philatelic exhibitions and having common exhibition areas in the international fairs.

15. The Turkish delegation also indicated their desire to see the ECO members among the members of the Eurasia Postal Union which was established by Turkey, Azerbaijan and Pakistan for improving the postal services in the region.

16. The meeting further recommended that the above and the proposals made by Pakistan delegation at the 3rd ECO Ministerial meeting in the field of postal and postal payment services should be referred to the 13th meeting of the Directors General of National Telecommunication Companies and Postal Authorities to be held in Almaty on October 28-30, 2002.

17. The delegation of the Islamic Republic of Iran expressed its readiness to host the 1st Ministerial meeting on Information and Communication Technology (ICT) in Tehran in the year 2003 and also stated its willingness to establish a research and training center for ICT in Tehran. The details of which will be provided to the ECO Secretariat for consideration of the member states.

Agenda Item No. 7

Relevance of ECO Permanent Commission on Transport and Communications

18. The representative of the ECO Secretariat briefed the meeting on the present status of implementation of the previous ECO Ministerial meeting on the ECO Permanent Commission on Transport and Communications (PCTC).

19. After due deliberation, the meeting decided to set up an expert working group to look into the possibility of creating an alternate structure to serve as a coordinator for the overall implementation of the projects envisaged in the Programme of Action of ECO Decade of Transport and Communications.

20. In addition, the meeting proposed the secondment of experts by member states at their own expense for short or longer duration to assist the ECO Secretariat in its efforts for developing and implementing various projects and action plans in the field of transport and communications.

Agenda Item No. 8

Early operationalization of the Transit Transport Framework Agreement (TTFA) and Transit Trade Agreement (TTA).

21. The meeting requested the member states to expedite the completion of ratification formalities of the Transit Transport Framework Agreement (TTFA) at national level. According to the recommendations of the 12th RPC meeting an expert group should be established which would be responsible for harmonizing and eliminating problems likely to occur during the implementation phase of Transit Transport Framework Agreement (TTFA) and Transit Trade Agreement (TTA). It recommended an early convening of the said group meeting to reconcile the inconsistency between the two agreements keeping in view the provisions of the relevant international conventions.

22. The representatives of the Republics of Turkey and Kazakhstan informed the meeting that the formalities for the ratification of TTFA were likely to be completed within a short period.

23. The government of the Republic of Turkey expressed their agreement in principle to consider hosting the meeting of the said experts group in the month of January, 2003. Turkey will inform the Secretariat of its decision on the subject.

Agenda Item No. 9

Deliberation of urgent measures/actions in the field of road transport within ECO region.

24. The delegation of the Republic of Turkey submitted the following two proposals (**Annex-V**) for consideration/approval by the meeting:

- i. ECO Multilateral permits;
- ii. Draft ECO MoU on the facilitation and harmonization of international road transport of goods.

25. Some delegations expressed their views that there is an urgent need to remove the existing non-physical obstacles to the means of transport in the region.

26. In view of the needs of a new idea and common efforts to facilitate road transport in the region, the meeting decided to set up a working group to consider the comments/views of the member states on the Turkish proposals which should be conveyed to the ECO Secretariat by January 1, 2003.

Agenda Item No. 10

Presentation of representatives from UNCTAD, UNESCAP and other international associations/agencies.

27. The representatives of UNESCAP and UNCTAD made presentation on their activities in the region. They also made useful observations under the relevant agenda items. The meeting took note of the close cooperation between UNCTAD and ECO in

the areas of: a) Transport and Transit Facilitation; b) Trade and Customs Facilitation, and c) land-locked and transit countries.

28. The meeting welcomed the offer of UNESCAP to share its Asian Highway database resources with the ECO Secretariat and appreciated the information with respect to the planned meetings of particular relevance to ECO.

29. The Ministers welcomed the recently established institutional arrangement, mechanism and modalities for cooperation, with the aim to develop a work programme for further strengthening ECO-ASEAN cooperation in the fields of Transport and Communications, Trade and Investment, Energy, HRD, narcotic control and other areas of ECO activities. They also noted with full satisfaction the positive developments reported by the honourable Secretary General with regard to technical as well as financial support from the UNDP for the networking and data development linking the ECO Secretariat with ECO member states.

Agenda Item No. 11

Any other business

30. The delegation of the Islamic Republic of Iran expressed its readiness to host the meeting of the concerned authorities of the member states to consider the possibility of cooperation in the field of sea port and shipping facilities in one of the cities at Caspian coastal area of Iran in the year 2003. It also requested the member states to actively participate in the 1st meeting of the ECO Central Insurance Authorities to consider a draft Agreement on ECO Interim Motor Vehicle Third Party Liability Insurance Scheme to be held in Tehran on November 17-19, 2002.

31. The delegation of Turkey made a proposal concerning the creation of a Eurasian Transport Study Center within the context of ECO. This center would study all matters concerning transport issues affecting the ECO region which constitutes a key position in the Eurasian transport corridors. It means that the center would approach transport issues in more comprehensive manner to ensure coordinated results for the member countries. For this purpose, Turkey would present a detailed Terms of Reference (ToR) to the ECO Secretariat with a view to its consideration by the member countries.

32. The meeting took note of the proposal from the ECO Secretariat suggesting more active ECO's role in the Silk Road Area Development Project and proposed further discussion on the subject in the light of details circulated among the member states.

Agenda Item No. 12

Date and venue of the next Meeting

33. The delegation of the Kyrgyz Republic expressed the readiness of its country to host the 5th ECO Ministerial meeting on Transport and Communications in the year 2004. The exact dates and venue will be conveyed through the ECO Secretariat in due course.

Agenda Item No. 13:Adoption of the Report

34. The Report of the meeting prepared by the Senior Officials meeting on the eve of Ministerial meeting was unanimously adopted.

Agenda Item No. 14Vote of thanks and closing of the Meeting

35. At the conclusion of the meeting, all heads of delegations expressed their vote of thanks to the Chairman for conducting the deliberations of the meeting in a smooth and efficient manner and to the Government of the Republic of Turkey, more particularly to the Ministry of Transport for the excellent arrangements made for the meeting and for the traditionally cordial hospitality extended to all the participants. The meeting also appreciated the efforts of the Secretary General of ECO and his staff for preparation of the detailed and comprehensive Working Papers which facilitated the work of the meeting.