

# **The 3<sup>rd</sup> Ministerial Meeting**

on Transport & Communications

Report

( Islamabad , 27-28 April, 2000 )

The 3<sup>rd</sup> ECO Ministerial Meeting on Transport and Communications was held in Islamabad (Pakistan) on 27-28 April, 2000. The Meeting was attended by the delegations of the Republic of Azerbaijan, Islamic Republic of Iran, Republic of Kazakhstan, Kyrgyz Republic, Islamic Republic of Pakistan, Republic of Tajikistan, Republic of Turkey, Turkmenistan and Republic of Uzbekistan. The ECO Secretariat's delegation headed by H.E. Ambassador Önder Özar, Secretary General 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. General Pervez Musharraf, Chief Executive of Pakistan. A copy of his inaugural address is placed at **Annex-II**.

3. H.E. Mr. Önder Özar, Secretary General of ECO expressed deep gratitude to the Government of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan, particularly to the Ministry of Communications for hosting the Meeting in Islamabad in an excellent manner and wished all the participants of the Meeting useful deliberations and fruitful results on the issues highlighted in the agenda. The text of his statement is placed at **Annex-III**.

## **Agenda Item No. 2**

### Election of the Chairman

4. H.E. Lt. General (Retd.) Iftikhar Hussain Shah, Minister for Communications of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan was unanimously elected as the Chairman of the Meeting.

## **Agenda Item No. 3**

### Adoption of the Agenda

5. The draft Agenda of the Meeting endorsed by the Senior Officials Meeting held in Islamabad on 24-26 April, 2000 was adopted. The approved agenda is placed at **Annex-IV**.

## **Agenda Item No. 4**

### Appointment of the Drafting Committee

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

## **Agenda Item No. 5**

Country Reports on the implementation of the Programme of Action for the ECO Decade of Transport and Communications (1998-2007)

7. The Ministers/Heads of delegation presented their country reports on the implementation of the Programme of Action for the ECO Decade of Transport and Communications (1998-2007) at national level as well as their development plans and projects to be implemented in the short-term perspective to increase the traffic capacity of their national railway networks, improve the physical conditions of the existing road networks and build new roads and railways. Copies of the said country reports are placed at **Annex-V**.

8. The Ministerial Meeting took note of the importance of the development of the ECO transit routes along the “East-West” and “North-South” Transport Corridors at national level. It was decided particularly to indicate the average speed of the container and/or block trains of 1000 km per day (24 hours) along the said corridors as the target value to be achieved in future.

9. In this connection, it was highlighted that the completion of the Bafq-Meshhad, Kerman-Zahedan, Bosphorus Tunnel Crossing and other missing railway links were of vital importance to the ECO Region. On the other hand, the importance of construction of Chamman-Herat-Kushka railway link was also highlighted.

10. The Azerbaijan delegation requested the relevant authorities of the Islamic Republic of Iran and Republic of Turkey to consider construction of Astara-Rasht-Kazvin railway line and the junction of Nakhichevan-Sadarak railway link with the Turkish railway network viz the Lake Van bypass railway line.

11. The importance of the agreed tariff systems to increase the volume of transportation among the Member countries was duly emphasized. In this respect, the Meeting endorsed the decision of the 4<sup>th</sup> Meeting of the Heads of ECO Railway Authorities to set up an Experts Group to study and formulate a flexible tariff policy for economical and efficient organization of railway transportation in the ECO region. However, Turkmenistan delegation expressed reservation regarding the above mentioned decision.

12. The Ministers/Heads of delegation welcomed the initiative of the Turkish delegation to host the said Experts Group’s Meeting in Turkey prior to the 5<sup>th</sup> Meeting of the Heads of ECO Railway Authorities to be held in Almaty on 19-21 September, 2000.

13. The Ministerial Meeting requested through the Government of the Republic of Uzbekistan the Uzbekistan Railway Joint Stock Company “Uzbekiston Temir Yollari” to host the 2<sup>nd</sup> Meeting of the Group of Technical Experts to prepare recommendations on establishment of a Common Information System for efficient organization of railway transportation in the ECO Region, in Tashkent before September, 2000.

14. The Ministers/Heads of delegation took note of the positive steps being taken by Kazakhstan regarding the establishment of reduced coefficients of the existing railway tariffs from 1 January, 2000 to make the railway transportation more competitive and increase its volume.

15. The delegation of the Kyrgyz Republic informed the meeting that in spite of the existence of bilateral agreements between the Member States in the region, there were complaints of excessive charging from the means of transport increasing the transport costs for the shippers/consignees which should be avoided. This view point was supported by Iran, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan delegations.

16. The Ministerial Meeting took note of the Turkish delegation's proposals regarding the introduction of ECO Multilateral Quota for Road Transport Permits and harmonization of bilateral road permit prices and asked the Secretariat to refer the matter to an appropriate ECO body or to a working group to be set up for further study and report back to higher decision-making organs of the ECO.

17. The Ministers/Heads of delegation appreciated the valuable efforts of the Ministry of Roads and Transportation of the Islamic Republic of Iran in publication of the ECO Road and Railway Network maps and requested all the Member States to furnish their comments/modifications, if any, to the ECO Secretariat by 10 May, 2000, so as to enable the relevant authorities of Islamic Republic of Iran to issue the updated maps at the earliest. The amendments proposed by Pakistan had been accepted and would be incorporated in the updated maps.

18. The Ministerial Meeting welcomed the invitation of the Government of the Republic of Kazakhstan to the ECO Member States to participate in the 3<sup>rd</sup> International Conference "TRANSEURASIA-2000" to be held in Astana on 14-15 June, 2000.

#### **Agenda Item No. 6**

Consideration and adoption of the draft Terms of Reference (TOR) of the ECO Permanent Commission on Transport and Communications on the basis of the Member States' final views.

19. The Ministerial Meeting discussed the final comments and proposals of some of the Member States and adopted (with Turkmenistan abstaining) the Terms of Reference (TOR) of the ECO Permanent Commission on Transport and Communications (PCTC) and submitted the same to the 10<sup>th</sup> COM Meeting (to be held in Tehran on 8 June, 2000) for final approval. The adopted TOR of the ECO PCTC is placed at **Annex-VI**.

20. The delegation of Turkmenistan expressed its view-point that the Article-5 "Permanent Commission Secretariat" does not fully conform to the provisions of para 16 of the Ashgabat Declaration (1997) which stipulates the location of the working mechanism of the Permanent Commission to be in Ashgabat.

#### **Agenda Item No. 7**

Promotion of the establishment of a Data Bank on the ECO Road Network and preparation of a detailed directory to help the drivers of road transport to be

implemented by the road authorities of the Republic of Turkey in the years 2000-2001 on the basis of the TOR prepared by the ECO Secretariat.

21. The Turkish delegation informed the meeting that upon the non-provision of TOR by the ECO Secretariat they are willing to formulate TOR with related cost estimate for the preparation of a detailed directory for the drivers of the road transport. They also proposed to use the format of the Data Bank devised by UNESCAP and to depict only international transit routes in the map to be included in the ECO Directory. The UNESCAP's format is placed at **Annex-VII**.

22. The Ministers/Heads of delegation endorsed the proposals of the Turkish delegation, supported by many delegations, and recommended to use the data which had already been conveyed by the Member States to the UNESCAP under the format referred to above.

23. The Ministerial Meeting recommended to the relevant authorities of the Republic of Turkey to prepare a draft format of the Directory by the end October, 2000, so as to enable the ECO Secretariat to obtain the concurrence of the Member States by the end December, 2000. After the completion of the required data collection, the relevant authorities of Turkey will furnish the final version of the Directory to the ECO Secretariat.

#### **Agenda Item No. 8**

Consideration and adoption of the Annexes of the TTFA and establishment of the Transit Transport Co-ordination Council (TTCC) under Article 36 of the agreement.

24. The Ministers/Heads of delegation considered and approved all the eight Annexes of the Transit Transport Framework Agreement (TTFA) finalized by the Senior Officials. A protocol containing the approved Annexes will be signed separately by the Ministers/Heads of delegation of the signatory Member States at a formal ceremony on 28<sup>th</sup> April, 2000, in this connection.

25. The Ministerial Meeting emphasized the importance of ratification of TTFA by all the signatory Member States (except Azerbaijan and Tajikistan) at the earliest to make it operational within the year 2000 and recommended to the relevant authorities in the Member States to designate their representatives to the Transit Transport Coordination Council according to Article-1 of the TOR of the TTCC by October, 2000 at the latest.

26. The Ministers/Heads of delegation also took note of the separate views of Turkmenistan delegation about Annexes-V & VIII presented during the 10<sup>th</sup> RPC Meeting (Tehran, 7-10 February, 2000) and incorporated in the Working Papers discussed in this meeting.

#### **Agenda Item No. 9**

Consideration of the ECO Shipping Company's activities and to propose the feasible joint actions to make it a self-sustaining and viable concern.

27. The Ministerial Meeting while appreciating the key role of the Islamic Republic of Iran in keeping operational the ECO Shipping Company, welcomed the interest

expressed by other signatory Member States, in the continued functioning of the company and making their initial contribution before 30<sup>th</sup> June, 2000.

28. To resolve the outstanding problems of ECO Shipping Company, it was decided that within one month from the deadline (June 30, 2000) a committee consisting of countries which had paid their initial equity shares will be set up. This committee in consultation with the ECO Secretariat and its Legal Adviser will revise the Articles of Association of the said company in accordance with the relevant laws and regulations and make appropriate decisions on the new status of the company.

### **Agenda Item No. 10**

#### Consideration of the expediency of further development of ECO Air Project.

29. After having considered the views/opinions expressed by the signatory Member States on the current status of the ECO Air project as well as the views of the other Member States on this subject, the Ministers and Heads of delegation recommended to the 1<sup>st</sup> Meeting of the ECO Civil Aviation Authorities and Heads of National Airlines to be held in Karachi on 17-19 November, 2000 to consider:

- (a) the expediency of further development of ECO Air project, as well as
- (b) the possibility for the non-signatory Member States to join ECO Air or
- (c) the possibility of introducing instead of ECO Airline an ECO Air Pool within the ECO region particularly among the capitals and major cities of the Member States and among the popular tourist centers in the region.

30. The Ministerial Meeting urged the Member States to furnish to the ECO Secretariat their comments/views on the draft Agenda of the 1<sup>st</sup> Meeting of the ECO Civil Aviation Authorities and Heads of National Airlines, prepared and circulated by the ECO Secretariat, preferably by 1<sup>st</sup> July, 2000.

### **Agenda Item No. 11**

#### Review of implementation of the Plan for Development of Telecommunications and Postal links in the ECO Region.

31. The ECO Secretariat briefed the Meeting on the implementation of the Plan for Development of Telecommunications and Postal links in the ECO region particularly the accession of majority of the ECO Member States to Trans-Asia-Europe Fiber Optical Cable System (TAEFOS) and expressed hope that Afghanistan, Azerbaijan and Pakistan would also be able to do so in near future. The Member States were also requested to volunteer themselves to host the 13<sup>th</sup> Meeting of the Directors General of National Telecommunications and Postal Authorities of the Member States taking into account that the previous meetings were hosted by the telecommunication authorities of the Islamic Republic of Iran, Pakistan, Turkey and Turkmenistan.

32. The delegation of the Islamic Republic of Iran recalled the fruitful outcome of the 12<sup>th</sup> Meeting of the Directors General of National Telecommunications and Postal Authorities of the Member States held in Istanbul on 1-3 December, 1999 and practical impact of the Experts Working Group Meeting on the Trans-Asian-Europe Fiber Optical

Cable System (TAEFOS) held in Tehran on 23-25 January, 2000, and proposed to hold separate meetings of the ECO Postal Authorities on biennial basis.

33. The delegation of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan emphasized the importance of the establishment of ECO Telecom Website and the exchange of information and existing experience among the Member States as well as expressed the hope that interconnection with TAEFOS between Iran and Pakistan will be realized next year.

34. The delegation of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan also submitted the following proposals for consideration:

- i) Establishment of direct mail links between ECO Member Countries for development of postal services in the region
- ii) Introduction of Express Mail Service (EMS) between ECO Members States
- iii) Mutual reduction in the inward handling costs of parcel and EMS services
- iv) Regular participation of the qualified postal officials in the meetings of Directors General of Telecommunications and Posts of the ECO Member Countries held every year

The text of the proposals submitted by the delegation of Pakistan are placed at ***Annex-VIII.***

35. The Ministerial Meeting took note of the enormous potential for growth of postal business in the ECO region and the scope for more closer collaboration between the postal administrations of the Member States to mutually exploit and avail the so far unexplored opportunities in postal market. With a view to ensuring the development of cooperation between them at the ECO fora, it was decided that qualified postal officials should in future be invited from each Member Country to participate in the meetings of Directors General of Telecommunications and Postal Authorities. One full session should be reserved for discussion on postal matters, in future meetings.

36. The delegation of the Republic of Uzbekistan stated that they will soon decide about hosting of the 13<sup>th</sup> Meeting of the DGs of National Telecommunications and Postal Authorities of the Member States as requested by the previous DGs meeting.

## **Agenda Item No. 12**

Cooperation with the Project Working Group on Transport and Border Crossing Facilitation under UN Special Programme for the Economies of Central Asia (SPECA) and programmes/projects of other international organizations.

37. The Ministers/Heads of delegation expressed their satisfaction and support regarding the expanding cooperation between ECO and other international organizations in the field of transport and communications and endorsed the recommendations of the 10<sup>th</sup> RPC Meeting (Tehran, 7-10 February, 2000). In this connection, an appeal was addressed to the concerned Member States namely Afghanistan, Azerbaijan, Iran (Islamic Republic), Pakistan and Turkey to attend as observers the future sessions of the Project Working Group (PWG) on Transport and

Border Crossing Facilitation under UNESCAP/UNECE Special Programme for the Economies of Central Asia (SPECA) in Almaty.

38. The Ministerial Meeting endorsed the establishment of the three UIC Global Rail Corridors named below which pass through the ECO region and urged the railway authorities of the Member States to take part in the Corridor Task Forces' activities:

- (i) Japan/South Korea - China-Central Asia-Caucasus-Europe;
- (ii) China-Middle East - Europe;
- (iii) South-East Asia - Central Asia (Via Middle East).

39. The Ministers/Heads of delegation noted with appreciation the signing of the Technical Assistance Grant Agreement between ECO and IDB concerning Introduction of Multimodal Transport Operations in the ECO Region on 11 September, 1999 and confirmed the obligations of ECO as envisaged in this Agreement as well as requested the relevant authorities in the Member States to implement the ECO/IDB/ESCAP/UNCTAD Work Programme properly as scheduled.

40. The Ministerial Meeting recommended to the Member States to nominate their national coordinating departments to deal with the above-mentioned programmes/projects and corridors to facilitate smooth coordination with the ECO Secretariat and furnish the particulars of their focal points to the Secretariat by the end of May, 2000.

### **Agenda Item No. 13**

#### Any other business

41. Under this Agenda item, the Pakistan delegation proposed to consider a draft Islamabad Communiqué to be issued at the conclusion of the 3<sup>rd</sup> ECO Ministerial Meeting on Transport and Communications.

42. The Ministerial Meeting considered and unanimously adopted the Islamabad Communiqué, the text of which is placed at **Annex-IX**.

### **Agenda Item No. 14**

#### Date and venue of the next Meeting

43. The Ministers/Heads of delegation accepted with appreciation the kind offer of the delegation of the Republic of Turkey to host the 4<sup>th</sup> ECO Ministerial Meeting on Transport and Communications in the first half of 2002. The exact venue and dates will be communicated in due course by the Turkish authorities.

### **Agenda Item No. 15**

#### Adoption of the Report

44. The Report of the Meeting was unanimously adopted.

### **Agenda Item No. 16**

#### Vote of thanks and closing of the Meeting

45. At the conclusion of the Meeting, all heads of delegation 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 Islamic Republic of Pakistan, more particularly to the Ministry of Communications 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.