

## **The 3<sup>rd</sup> ECO Ministerial Meeting on Transport and Communications**

Statement by H.E. Ambassador Önder Özar Secretary General of ECO

( Islamabad , 27-28 April, 2000 )

*Annex-III*

*Honourable Chief Executive, H.E. General Pervez Musharraf,  
Excellencies, the Ministers and Heads of delegation,  
Distinguished Participants and guests  
Ladies and Gentlemen,*

It is a matter of great pleasure and honour for me to address the 3<sup>rd</sup> ECO Ministerial Meeting on Transport and Communications being held in this beautiful city of Islamabad. Let me, at the very outset, on behalf of the ECO Secretariat and on my own behalf express my profound gratitude and appreciation to the Government of Islamic Republic of Pakistan, particularly to the Ministry of Communications headed by His Excellency Syed Iftikhar Hussain Shah, Minister of Communications for very warm welcome and traditional hospitality extended to myself and my delegation since our arrival in Islamabad. I am particularly grateful to His Excellency General Pervez Musharraf the Honourable Chief Executive of Pakistan for sparing some of his extremely valuable time to inaugurate this important meeting.

The excellent hosting arrangements made for this meeting is indeed a clear evidence of the utmost importance that the Islamic Republic of Pakistan attaches to ECO and its activities promoting economic cooperation among the ECO Member States.

*Honourable Chief Executive,  
Excellencies,*

Our sectoral priorities cover all vital areas of economic development but, as it is underlined in the Economic Cooperation Strategy for the ECO region, transport and communications, trade and energy are at the top of our regional agenda. It is impossible to speak of speeding up economic growth and activity without proper development of the transport and communications linkages across the ECO region. Therefore it is of paramount importance for us to interconnect the main transport and communication arteries of ECO Member States among themselves, as well as with the global transport corridors. It is, therefore, high time for the ECO countries to mobilise their resources and energy in completing at the earliest various projects and plans in this important sector.

As you know, the 2<sup>nd</sup> Ministerial Meeting on Transport and Communications held in Ashgabat on 14<sup>th</sup> March, 1998 adopted the Programme of Action for the ECO Decade of Transport and Communications (1998-2007). It was a landmark document which stipulated the practical actions to be taken to achieve the objectives enshrined in the Treaty of Izmir, Quetta Plan of Action as well as the Istanbul Declaration on long-term perspectives for ECO. It is a road-map to implement the Almaty Outline Plan for Development of Transport sector in the ECO region (1993) as well as the provisions of the Ashgabat Declaration of 1997. It not only envisages the physical completion of

transport network in our region but also to increase its capacity through introduction of Multimodal transport and transit transport facilitation across the borders.

The main objective of the present meeting is a detailed review of the progress achieved in the implementation of the Programme of Action for the ECO Decade of Transport and Communications (1998-2008) and adoption of the consequential measures or guidelines to increase the volume of transport among the Member States and meet the demand for regular and reliable transportation of goods with a minimum guaranteed time of delivery and relatively low transport costs in the region.

A number of important developments have taken place since the 2<sup>nd</sup> Ministerial Meeting on Transport and Communications which was held in Ashgabat on 14<sup>th</sup> March, 1998. The construction of the Turkmenabad (Chaarjev) – Kerki –Kerkichi railway line in Turkmenistan with length of 203 km, development of the first phase of the Druzhba border interchange station in Kazakhstan as well as the reconstruction of the Actau commercial sea port in Kazakhstan were completed in the year 1999. Some of the Highway and Motorway links of the ECO Roads Network were put into operation in the Islamic Republic of Iran and Pakistan at the same time.

The ECO Road and Railway network maps have been published with the assistance of Iranian Ministry of Roads and Transportation and Railway authorities and circulated among the Member States. I would like to take this opportunity to express our gratitude to the relevant Iranian authorities for publishing these maps.

The ECO Transit Transport Framework Agreement (TTFA) was worked out and signed by all the Member States, except Uzbekistan, on 9<sup>th</sup> May, 1998 in Almaty. The Republics of Azerbaijan and Tajikistan have already ratified the Agreement. The Annexes of the TTFA have also been finalized and are awaiting your approval. It would be highly appreciated if all of the Member States (except Azerbaijan and Tajikistan) could ratify the Transit Transport Framework Agreement at the earliest so as to make it operational within this year. Let me take advantage of this important forum to invite the distinguished authorities of the Republic of Uzbekistan to join the other ECO Member States and sign the Agreement to make it an ECO-wide undertaking.

A High Level Experts group established to work out the Terms of Reference (TOR) of the Permanent Commission on Transport and Communications (PCTC) in pursuance of para 16 of the Ashgabat Declaration of 1997 held its two meetings during 1998-1999. Now, the draft TOR of the ECO PCTC finalised by the said HLEG are ready for consideration and adoption by this distinguished Meeting under Agenda item No.6.

Another important event, which took place since your last meeting, was the signing of a Technical Assistance Grant Agreement between ECO and the Islamic Development Bank (IDB) on Introduction of Multimodal Transport Operation in the ECO region at the ECO Secretariat on 11 September, 1999. Under the agreement the IDB will extend a grant of US\$272000 to conduct a study on multimodal transport operation in the ECO region with the help of consultants provided by UNESCAP and UNCTAD. The study

would be followed by a regional seminar and series of workshops at national level to create awareness among the policy-making officials and private sector in the Multimodal transport concept and set up Multimodal transport operation regime in the entire ECO region. This project is expected to be operational very soon.

As regards the offer of IDB to sponsor a study on restoration of the capability of the railway locomotives belonging to the Central Asian Members of ECO and to assist with establishment of cooperation among all the ECO Member States for maintenance and operation of their locomotives and rolling stock. The proposed study was postponed owing to financial constraints of IDB. However, the UNDP has lately agreed to include the pre-feasibility study on the said subject in the work-plan of the UNDP Project on Capacity Building of ECO Secretariat.

As a follow-up of the 3<sup>rd</sup> meeting of the Heads of ECO Railway Authorities held in Istanbul, meetings of the railway experts were held to study the following:

Opening the international passenger traffic along the main Trans-Asian Railway line Almaty-Tashkent-Tehran-Istanbul held in Almaty (Kazakhstan) on 28-30 June, 1999. The preparatory work is now underway to implement the Action Plan adopted by the 4<sup>th</sup> ECO Railway Authorities Meeting.

Establishment of a viable Common Information System for efficient organization of Railway Transportation held in Tehran on 29-30 August, 1999. The experts are still busy in working out the details which when finalized will be submitted for your approval in due course.

Furthermore, considering the challenges facing us at the threshold of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, and the vast implications of the globalization of the world economy and the multilateral trading system, the ECO Secretariat feels that there is a pressing need for evolving a flexible tariff policy in the field of goods transportation by all modes of transport particularly by the railway transport. The Secretariat intends to pursue the recommendation of the 4<sup>th</sup> ECO Railway Authorities meeting in this regard by holding a meeting of the railway experts to work out a flexible tariff policy to be introduced in the region in the near future.

The 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> Annual Meetings of the Directors General of National Telecommunication and Postal Authorities of ECO Member States were held in Islamabad and Istanbul in February and December, 1999 respectively. The Meetings made a number of useful recommendations to facilitate cooperation in this sector between the Member States.

The recommendations of these meetings have already been put on the Agenda of this meeting for your consideration and adoption.

The most significant achievement in the field of telecommunications was putting into operation the Trans-Asian-European Fiber Optic Cable System (TAEFOS) since the

end of 1998 which has connected Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan, Iran and Turkey with telecommunication network of the South-East Asian and European countries. We hope that in near future Azerbaijan, Pakistan and Tajikistan will also access the TAEFOS to establish a smooth and efficient telecommunication network in the region.

*Honourable Chief Executive,  
Distinguished delegates*

The purpose of these brief submissions was to highlight the importance being given, as one of our prime policy objectives, to the establishment of a modern and efficient transport and communications infrastructure in the ECO region linking Member States to each other and with the outside world. It has been duly recognised as the key priority area in the Economic Cooperation Strategy of ECO. The studies, projects and programmes undertaken and being finalized by international organizations like IDB, ESCAP, UNCTAD and UNDP on the ECO region reflect a positive interest on their part in our transport and communication projects.

We must take advantage of this situation in terms of our time and resources. Let us, therefore, rationalise our plans, make them more realistic and practicable and consistent with our capacity and resources. What is crucial in this exercise is the need to follow a truly professional approach in our projects by determining their techno-economic modalities and to inculcate a regional attitude and co-operative spirit in our transport-related national policies and plans.

I am sure this Meeting will provide a good opportunity to make an overall review of the activities in this sector particularly the implementation of the Almaty Outline Plan for Development of Transport Sector in the ECO region and the Programme of Action for the ECO Decade of Transport and Communications (1998-2007). The outcome of your deliberations here will enrich the agendas of the forthcoming meetings of the ECO Council of Ministers and the sixth ECO Summit being held in Tehran in the month of June, 2000.

In the end, I wish the distinguished delegates from the Member States a very pleasant stay in Islamabad and sincerely hope that this meeting will conclude with specific recommendations on the issues as highlighted in the agenda. May I, once again, express our thanks and appreciation to Honourable Chief Executive, H.E. General Pervez Musharraf and to the Government of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan for their positive contributions towards the success of this Meeting.

Thank you for your kind attention.