

The 2nd Ministerial Meeting

on Transport & Communications

Report

(Ashgabat, 14 March, 1998)

The Second ECO Ministerial Meeting on Transport and Communications was held in Ashgabat (Turkmenistan) on 14 March 1998. The meeting was attended by the delegations of the Islamic State of Afghanistan, Azerbaijan Republic, Islamic Republic of Iran, Republic of Kazakhstan, Kyrgyz Republic, Islamic Republic of Pakistan, Republic of Tajikistan, Republic of Turkey, Turkmenistan and Republic of Uzbekistan and Representatives of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and European Bank for Reconstruction & Development (EBRD). The ECO delegation headed by H.E. the Secretary General also attended the meeting. The list of participants is placed at ***Annex-I***.

Agenda Item No.1:

Inauguration of the meeting

2. The meeting was inaugurated by H.E. Mr. H. Halykov, Deputy Chairman of the Cabinet Ministers of Turkmenistan. He welcomed the Ministers/Heads and Members of the Delegations to the Meeting on behalf of himself and the President and the Government of Turkmenistan.

Agenda Item No.2:

Election of the Chairman

3. In terms of the ECO Rules of Procedure, H.E. Mr. H. Halykov, Deputy Chairman of the Cabinet Ministers of Turkmenistan being the head of the host delegation was unanimously elected as Chairman to preside over the meeting. He read out a message of H.E. Mr. Saparmurat Niyazov, the President of Turkmenistan which is at ***Annex-II***. It was followed a statement by the Secretary General of ECO attached as ***Annex-III***.

Agenda Item No.3:

Adoption of the Agenda

4. The meeting adopted its Agenda which is placed at ***Annex-IV***.

Agenda Item No.4:

Appointment of the Drafting Committee

5. In accordance with the ECO Rules of Procedure, it was decided to form an open-ended Drafting Committee to prepare the report of the meeting.

Agenda Item No.5:

Country Reports by the Heads of Delegations on the implementation of the Almaty Outline Plan

6. The Heads of the delegation read out their Country Reports highlighting national projects and programmes as envisaged in Almaty Outline Plan and Ashgabat Declaration 1997 as well as the required actions on the development of their national

parts of the ECO transit routes of the “East-West” and “North-South” Transport Corridors and the required infrastructure.

7. The Ministers noted with satisfaction that as a result of joint efforts made by the Governments of the ECO Member States and the ECO Secretariat significant qualitative changes have been brought about both in the construction of the transport infrastructure as well as the development of transport corridors and organization of international transportation in the ECO region. Valuable assistance of UN Agencies such as UNESCAP, UNDP, UNDP, UNCTAD, UNECE and international financial institutions namely EBRD and IDB in this regard was very much appreciated.

8. The meeting was informed that all member countries are currently engaged in implementation of their national transport development plans which also include projects envisaged in the Almaty Outline Plan and the Ashgabat Declaration (1997). In this context each delegation submitted a comprehensive report on what had already been done which projects were under implementation and which projects would be launched in 1999-2000 specifically covering the following aspects:

- a) Present status of the National Highways included in the ECO Road Network and Asian Highway (AH) of the ALTID Project of the UNESCAP.
- b) Construction of the missing links included in the ECO Railway Network and upgradation of the existing national parts of the Trans-Asian Railway (TAR).
- c) Present status of international transportation of goods among ECO countries and urgent measures on the development of multimodal transport in the region.

The copies of all the reports are placed at **Annex-V**.

9. The meeting requested the CPR to allow necessary payment to the concerned Turkish authorities from ECO Feasibility Fund for preparation of the following:

- i. Recommendations to bring ECO Road Network in line with the international standards including identification of locations and construction of the minimum road infrastructure requirements (e.g. filling-stations, vehicle service workshops, motels, cafes etc.).
- ii. A draft directory of ECO Road Network, both in English and Russian, specifying the existing and planned road infrastructure.

10. The meeting called upon the member states to furnish to the ECO Secretariat as soon as possible the pre-feasibility studies of the projects which were envisaged in Almaty Outline Plan and included in Ashgabat Declaration (1997). The meeting appreciated the Islamic Republic of Iran on the progress of Bafq-Mashhad and Kerman-Zahedan key railway projects in ECO Railway Network.

11. The meeting urged the member states to fully support the ECO/IDB/ESCAP/UNCTAD Joint Project on International Transport Development in the ECO Region with following components and requested the concerned International

Agencies to expedite the implementation of the said project in collaboration with ECO Secretariat:

- Development of legal and regulatory systems for efficient transport in the ECO region.
- Facilitation of Land Transport at Border-Crossings.
- International Multimodal Transport Operation in the ECO region.

12. With a view to promoting a common and uniform legal and regulatory framework for transit transportation the meeting encouraged the member states to consider the expediency of their accession not only to all the transport conventions listed in the UNESCAP Resolution 48/11 but also to the Convention on Transit Freedom Status (Barcelona Convention, 1921), Transit Trade Convention of Land-Locked Countries (New York Convention, 1965) and the International Convention on Simplification and Harmonization of Customs Procedures (Kyoto Convention 1973) if they have not yet done so. The Secretariat was asked to circulate copies of these Conventions among the member states.

Agenda Item 6:

Consideration of the Draft Transit Transport Framework Agreement and its Protocols

13. The meeting on the whole welcomed the draft Transit Transport Framework Agreement (TTFA) as formulated with assistance of the UNCTAD and considered during a conference held on 18-20 November, 1997 in Ashgabat with the participation of the ECO member states.

14. At the same time, it was felt that the Agreement needs some adjustments in accordance with the views and comments of the member states. It was, therefore, proposed to set up an ECO High-Level Experts Group which would meet in the first week of April, 1998 to study the draft agreement and its protocols in detail and prepare its final version as soon as possible and submit the same to the ECO Secretariat.

15. The finalized draft agreement prepared by the Experts Group will be submitted to the next meeting of RPC being held in Tehran on 19-21 April 1998 and subsequently to the meeting of the Council of Ministers to be held in Almaty in May 1998.

16. The delegation of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan offered to host the said meeting of the Experts Group in Islamabad. It was decided to hold the meeting in Islamabad during the first 10 days of April, 1998.

Agenda Item 7:

Consideration of the Programme of Action for ECO Decade of Transport and Communications (1996-2005).

17. The meeting considered the Draft Programme of Action for the ECO Decade of Transport and Communications (1996-2005) prepared by the ECO Secretariat and adopted unanimously with the amendments and supplementary proposals of some of the participating delegations as well as changed the time-frame of the decade to 1998-2007. The revised and updated version of the Programme of Action is at **Annex-VI**.

18. The meeting recommended that to ensure timely implementation of the projects included in the Programme of Action for ECO Decade on Transport and Communications (1998-2007), the participation of the private sector in their implementation be encouraged and funds from international financial institutions be sought for specific projects of the member states on the basis of bilateral and multilateral arrangements.

19. The meeting took note of the Background Paper titled “New Delhi Action Plan on Infrastructure Development in Asia and the Pacific – Review of Implementation” submitted by the UNESCAP Secretariat and appreciated the growing cooperation between ECO and ESCAP in different fields particularly in the field of Transport and Communications. They also appreciated the procedure of annual review of the Regional Action Programme of the NDAP by sub-regional organizations under the aegis of the Regional Inter-Agency Committee for Asia and Pacific (RICAP) of which ECO is also a member.

20. The meeting also encouraged the member states to expedite national level actions on the Regional Action Programme and to nominate national focal points and priority projects, in accordance with the ESCAP request, if they had not already done so.

Agenda Item 8:

Consideration of the need for establishment of an International Consortium for Transport Infra-structure Development

21. Bearing in mind the positive development with regard to the establishment of an international consortium by Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan for the construction of Eraliev-Gazanjyk-Gyzylatrek (Bender Torkeman) railway line which is open for accession by other countries, the meeting recommended that the establishment of ECO International Consortium for Infrastructure Development be initiated by at least two countries with the participation of the private sectors concerned.

22. The meeting recalled para 5 of the Ashgabat Declaration issued by the ECO Extraordinary Summit held in Ashgabat in 1997 in which it was provided that in view of the urgent need for the development of ECO region's rolling-stocks, a close cooperation among the ECO member states be promoted for manufacturing and repairing of locomotives, passenger carriages, freight cars, containers and other railway equipment, using ECO countries' own resources as well as preferential credits of international financial institutions issued under the guarantee of the Governments of ECO member states and other financial sources.

23. The meeting noted with appreciation the offer of the Islamic Development Bank to sponsor a study on restoration of 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.

24. It was decided that implementation of para 5 of the Ashgabat Declaration should be expedite and urgent measures should be taken to conduct the IDB study. After the results of the IDB study are available, the Secretariat will set up a High-Level Experts Group to examine and evaluate the recommendations and evolve necessary actions.

Agenda Item 9:

Establishment of a Permanent Commission on Transport and Communications in Ashgabat in pursuance of para 16 of the Ashgabat Declaration, 1997

25. The meeting considered the issue of the establishment of a Permanent Commission on Transport and Communications in Ashgabat under ECO as provided in para 16 of the Ashgabat Declaration issued by the ECO Extra-ordinary Summit held in Ashgabat in 1997 and decided to set up a High-Level Experts Group to discuss the matter and work out its organizational structure, terms of reference and working mechanism and submit its recommendations to the Secretariat as soon as possible for further processing.

26. The member states were accordingly requested to nominate their representatives for the Experts Group as soon as possible and inform the Secretariat by the end of May 1998.

Agenda Item 10:

Any Other Business

27. The meeting considered and endorsed the additional proposals submitted by the delegation of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan as under:

- Preparation of a compendium of laws, rules and procedures governing road, rail and air-transport, customs rules and procedures, trade practices as well as the postal and telecommunications network available in the member countries. This information may also please be made available in a website on internet.
- A directory of industries and services available in the member countries specifically in the Transport and Communications sector.
- Member countries should exchange information in respect of training facilities available in Transport and Communication sector in their respective countries.

28. The delegation of the Islamic Republic of Iran proposed that as the human resource development and training is an important issue for the improvement and betterment of the transport system in the region, the meeting may recommend to attract the international financial institutions such as IDB to assist the transport training centers of the region and provide scholarships to the member states in the fields of customs, transport and immigration.

29. The meeting endorsed the proposal.

Agenda Item 11:

Date and venue of the next meeting.

30. It was felt that there was need for the Ministerial meeting on Transport and Communication to be held more frequently and at regular intervals to provide necessary push for expeditious implementation of the projects and programmes envisaged in

different ECO documents such as Almaty Outline Plan and the Ashgabat Declaration (1997). It was, therefore, decided to hold the Ministerial meeting on Transport and Communications at least once in every two years.

31. The meeting appreciated the offer of the delegation of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan to host the next Ministerial meeting in Islamabad. Accordingly it was decided to hold the Third ECO Ministerial meeting on Transport and Communications in 2002 at Islamabad.

Agenda Item 12:

Adoption of the Report

32. The report of the Second ECO Ministerial meeting on Transport and Communications was adopted unanimously.

Agenda Item 13:

Vote of Thanks

33. The meeting concluded with a vote of thanks to the Chairman for conducting the deliberations of the meeting in the most efficient manner. All the delegations placed on record their deep appreciation and thanks to the Government of Turkmenistan for the excellent arrangements made for the meeting and the warm hospitality extended to them. The meeting also appreciated the efforts of the Secretary General and his staff in the preparation of comprehensive working papers to facilitate this work.