



Report

14th Meeting of Heads of Railway Authorities/ 8th Railway Committee Meeting of TTCC

Dushanbe, 20-21 June, 2019

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The 14th Meeting of Heads of ECO Railway Authorities/8th Meeting of Railway Committee of TTC was held in Dushanbe, Tajikistan, on 20-21 June 2019. The Meeting was participated by high-level delegations from ECO Member States, except Afghanistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan. The ECO delegation along with the partner International Organizations i.e. IDB, ESCAP, UIC, OTIF and ADB also attended the Meeting and essentially contributed to substantive deliberations. The list of participants is attached at **Annex-I**.

Agenda Item No. 1

Inauguration of the Meeting

2. His Excellency Mr. Sohrab Mirzozoda, First Deputy Minister of Transport of Republic of Tajikistan delivered his inaugural statement. At the onset, Mr. S. Mirzozoda welcomed the delegates from ECO Member States and International Organizations to Dushanbe. He informed the delegates about the importance of cooperation among the ECO Member States on railway networks development. In particular, he presented a detailed overview of the latest milestones in Tajikistan Railway, notified specific railway routes/links/paths that have mutually important value for the neighboring ECO Member States.

3. Mr. Ahmad Saffari, Director for Transport and Communications of ECO Secretariat, on behalf of H.E. Dr. Hadi Soleimanpur, ECO Secretary General, expressed gratitude to the Government of the Republic of Tajikistan for hosting the Meeting and thanked the delegates of ECO Member States and International Organizations for participation. He further informed about recent developments in ECO railway network in pursuance of railway-related provisions of *Turkmenbashi Declaration* adopted by the 9th ECO Ministerial Meeting on Transport (May 2018) inter-alia: focus on prime work areas by concentrating on ‘early operationalization’ of ITI and Istanbul-Almaty railway routes in East-West direction and KTI and Bandar Abbas-Almaty in North-South direction; expansion in new railway routes as the latter are economically beneficial for eventual improvement of regional connectivity; transit transport was tasked to facilitate trade as the intra-trade aims to increase twofold by 2025 given the importance of transforming the existing transit corridors of ECO into the economic corridors; to implement TTFA railway-related provisions as they advocate for internationally harmonious technical compliance and standardization on which ECO relies on the cooperation with UIC and other partner organizations. The TTFA also provides the ECO Member States with a legal base for resolution between the Member States, if required; the need to connect ECO Corridors to the neighboring areas including China. All these measures were said to contribute to greater efficiency and

productivity in regional railway. In the end wished for successful deliberations with concrete outcome.

4. The copies of both statements are at **Annex II**.

Agenda Item No. 2

Election of the Chairman

5. Mr. Nihmatzoda Farruh, Head of Section of Inland Transport Unit of Ministry of Transport of Republic of Tajikistan was elected as Chairman of the Meeting.

Agenda Item No. 3

Adoption of the Agenda

6. The Meeting adopted its Agenda as proposed by the ECO Secretariat. The copy of the agenda is at **Annex III**.

Agenda Item No. 4

Appointment of Drafting Committee

7. An open-ended Drafting Committee was appointed to prepare the Report of the Meeting.

Agenda Item No. 5

Statements/Country Reports

8. Heads of Delegations delivered statements/presentations on latest developments in railway sector reflecting the time period since 13th Meeting of Heads of ECO Railway Authorities/7th Railway Committee Meeting of TTCC (Baku, 17-18 April 2017). The copies of available statements are at **Annex IV**.

Agenda Item No. 6

Statements of International Organizations on Cooperation with ECO on railways

9. The Representative of the Islamic Development Bank (IsDB) Dr. Ali Mansour Fallahi highlighted the importance of cooperation between IsDB and ECO and informed about a Study on "Enhancing Regional Connectivity through Geographical Information System (GIS)" that has been commissioned by Bank in ECO region. He described features of the project as it (i) aims at

establishing a GIS Database, (ii) facilitates processing of transport infrastructure data (transport operations, trade flows, investment projects for filling missing links and upgrading of existing networks, etc.); (iii) presents an extensive inventory of infrastructure projects for participating countries including Project description, estimated budgets and implementation plans. In that regard, the speaker referred to the project's existing questionnaire for data collection as not simple and thus recommended to simplify the questionnaires. He also informed that recently IsDB has developed an RCI Strategy as an upstream policy document for channeling its financial/on-financial resources to promote South-South cooperation, to reinforce complementarities and establish closer dialogue between MCs, leverage regional value chain opportunities, and facilitate exchange of knowledge and best practices among actors in MCs. He invited ECO for cooperation on policy work.

10. The Representative of the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP) Mr. Sandeep Raj Jain delivered the presentation on his organization's initiatives to strengthen international railway transport in ESCAP region. He informed that the sixth meeting of the Working Group on Trans-Asian Railway Network (TARN) would be held in Bangkok in December 2019 and requested railway authorities of ECO Member States to participate. The working group would consider, among others, issues related to enhancing efficiency of railway border crossings along the TARN, particularly, related to (a) standardization of electronic information exchange among railways and control authorities to complete operational and regulatory formalities; and (b) harmonization of customs formalities required for efficient international railway transport. Further, he updated the meeting on cooperation with ECO on joint study project on commercialization of KTI railway corridor. Finally, he informed the meeting regarding implementation of a project on "Operationalizing Sustainable Transport Connectivity along China-Central Asia-West Asia Economic Corridor to achieve 2030 Agenda" and urged the ECO railway and transport authorities to participate actively in project activities to support development of corridor management strategy that aims to identify and implement coordinated arrangements for efficient transport along the corridor.

11. The Representative of the International Union of Railways (UIC) Mrs. Irina Petrunina pointed out the importance of implementation of the Joint Actions Plan between ECO and UIC. In specific terms, she highlighted the following primary steps to: (i) jointly implement the Actions Plan between ECO and UIC on cooperation in railways, (ii) jointly organize a seminar dedicated to exchanging of best practices in operational interoperability, (iii) review progress on filling in the missing links, (iv) jointly identify priorities in regional cooperation and partnership, (v) cooperate on the development of an overall regional strategy aligned with dedicated strategies of ECO as well as other regional partners. UIC recommended putting in practice the pattern of arranging the technical consultations on joint project implementation dedicated to innovative or research topics in the railway industry so that these could be sidelined with regular planned events. The Meeting noted this recommendation for action.

12. The Representative of the Intergovernmental Organization for International Carriage by Rail (OTIF) Mr. Aleksandr Kuzmenko delivered the presentation on the recent legal and institutional developments of OTIF and COTIF. The importance of cooperation between OTIF and ECO based on the Memorandum of Understanding between the two organizations has been

re-iterated. The meeting was informed that the ECO Member State, Afghanistan, has acceded to COTIF on 1 May 2019.

13. Statement of the United Nations Economic Council for Europe (UNECE) presented for the attention of the esteemed Meeting, in writing, has confirmed the commitment of the UNECE for furthering the international cooperation with ECO, notably, on the Joint IDB/UNECE project on Transport Geographic Information System (GIS).

14. Further, the representative of the Asian Development Bank (ADB) Mr. Farrukh Nuriddinov delivered the presentation on the ways in which the ECO Member States are eligible for ensuring financing, including for regional railway and transport projects, from multilateral development banks, such as, ADB and global financial institutions.

15. The copies of the presentations are at Annex V.

Agenda Item No.7

Review of implementation of outcomes of the session/dialogue between ECO Member States and People's Republic of China (PRC)

16. The Secretariat informed the Meeting that, in compliance with Rules of procedure of ECO on inviting non-Member States for ECO's official events, the formal letter of invitation was sent to the Embassy of the People's Republic of China (PRC) in Tehran. Such procedure was necessitated from previous multiple-level participation of China in ECO's transport-related events entailing uneasiness in locating relevant bodies/structures to assume the responsibility for follow up implementation. With reference to the abovementioned circumstance, the Meeting instructed the Secretariat to prepare a succinct formal note to the attention of China Railway (CR) requesting for a nomination of a permanent Focal Point to interact with ECO on regular basis.

Agenda Item No.8

Consideration of implementation of ECO's Main Railway Routes

17. The Meeting apprehended the current status of progress on ECO's key railway routes and welcomed concrete steps being undertaken by the concerned authorities in the Member States in their operationalizing/commercializing the railway projects as follows:

i. Kazakhstan-Turkmenistan-Iran Railway

18. Given that Technical Cooperation Agreement (TCA) between ECO and IDB on the Study for "Commercialization of Regional Railway Corridor between IsDB-ECO Common Member Countries" signed in August 2017 and MoA between ECO and UNESCAP finalized in July

2018, the Meeting followed up with the outcomes of the inception meeting on KTI, held on 10-11 April 2019 at the Secretariat. The Meeting noted with satisfaction that conclusions of the aforementioned event were already shared among the involved Member States.

19. Delegate of the Islamic Republic of Iran delivered a presentation updating the Meeting about current developments in its segment of the project. In overall, on national railway performance over the last year, it was noted that the total length of railway lines recorded 13,000 km lines in length; 25,000 freight cars; 556 locos; freight reached 50 million tons with the prospects of increasing it up to 95 million tons by 2021; passenger transportation recorded 28 million persons carried. Moreover, 7 large locomotive and wagon manufacturing plants were activated. It was also mentioned that on 11-13 November 2019 the *UIC Next Station 2019 Conference* will be held in Iran, the first ever conference to bring together countries of the Middle East, North Caucasus and Central Asia.

20. Delegate of Republic of Kazakhstan delivered a statement notifying the importance of the multimodal transit along this route. In addition, the recent achievements along the Trans-Caspian International Transit Corridor were referred to as success where freight volumes increased by 13 times compared to the previous period.

21. Specifically, on the KTI project, the Meeting instructed the Secretariat to ensure that the implementation of the Study Project on KTI be realized timely, in line with its set schedule. In regard of the planned event on this route, Iran suggested to host the event at level of Deputy Heads of Railway Authorities of enroute countries in charge of trade issues on KTI during 2019 in Tehran with participation of private sector undertakings (traders) that are engaged in the route-related activities.

22. The Meeting was updated by the Secretariat about the current need to transform ECO's existing railway routes, particularly KTI, from a transit corridor into an economic corridor (i) to generate its inherent all-purpose network sourcing from production inlets, (ii) supply chains feeding container trains with production output and (iii) delivering all-type rail-based freight and cargo to final seaport outlets. Such measure may eventually lead to the establishment of self-sufficient route in close vicinity to the economic and free trade structuring zones along ECO's main transport corridors and international seaports in the ECO region. It was further noted that, for this particular target, an international consultant may be hired to strategize on the abovementioned transformation of railways into the integrated economic and free trade space to ensure its full alignment with transport policies of ECO Member States.

23. The Meeting requested enroute countries to collaborate with the ECO Secretariat and the responsible project team, potentially, by: (i) providing required data/information for questionnaires, (ii) assisting in organizing a test run along KTI, and (iii) facilitating inter-agency exchange of correspondences on Corridor Management Mechanism (CMM) as proposed by the Meeting of Heads of Railways of enroute countries Turkmenistan, Kazakhstan, Iran (*Tehran, 6 February 2017, KTI Report, paragraph 15 (ii)*).

24. Representative of ESCAP requested the KTI enroute countries to ensure that the inter-governmental agreement should be in place to endorse the findings/options for the Common Management Mechanism that would be developed under the Study Project on KTI.

ii. **ECO Container Train on Islamabad-Tehran-Istanbul route (ITI)**

25. The Meeting acknowledged that revised tariffs/time tables on the ITI were received by the Secretariat in February 2018 from Pakistan. Similar revisions were obtained in March and May 2019 from Iran and Turkey, respectively. Based on those documents, the 2019 newly revised tariffs have duly been disseminated among enroute Member States through Note No. 351 dated 02.05.2019.

26. Delegate of Republic of Turkey delivered a presentation informing the Meeting about the current infrastructure developments on its respective ITI segment. The Meeting was further updated about the timing of hosting the 10th HLWGM on the ITI, which would be relayed to the Secretariat immediate upon return of the Delegation back to their capital. It was decided that competent private sector railway undertakings from Turkey, Pakistan and Iran will also be invited to the aforementioned event.

27. Delegate of Islamic Republic of Pakistan stated that Pakistan remains committed to the goals of the development of the regional railway network of the ECO. The latter as an economic bloc is vital for Pakistan. Commitment to complete railway rehabilitation and upgradation processes, including on the ITI relevant segment in Pakistan, was re-iterated thereby fulfilling the prospects in priorities envisaged in ECO Vision 2025. It was further noted that the Taftan-Zahedan segment is undergoing rehabilitation under the CPEC railway project.

28. Delegate of I.R. of Iran updated the Meeting about the current infrastructure developments on the ITI segment in Iran. Building on the earlier proposal of Iran, posted at 29th RPC Meeting (29th RPC Work Program-TC, para-11), Iran re-iterated its readiness to cooperate with the ITI project's parties, and also, other enroute countries on passenger trains. Specifically, the delegate of I. R. of Iran presented the Meeting a proposal relating to the potentially future cooperation on passenger transportation by rail.

29. The Meeting stressed the need for transforming ECO's existing railway routes into economic spaces with structured integrated economic and free trade hubs with production sources closely intertwined with supply chains so that railway services could further maximize on large scale spillover effects of such zones.

30. The Meeting while referring to past practices in cross border facilitation of railways and customs administration improvement along the ITI route noted that those practices may not be left out unattended in pursuit of progressive commercializing of the route. In that regard, the Meeting encouraged that the TTFA provisions relating to cross border facilitation, modernization of border crossing points and customs administration improvement will virtually become an

inalienable part of the process of operationalization and commercialization of the ITI and ECO's other mainstream railway routes.

iii. ECO Container Trains on Istanbul-Almaty and Bandar Abbas-Almaty routes

31. The Meeting acknowledged that the Study on Commercialization of ECO Container Trains on Istanbul-Almaty and Bandar Abbas-Almaty routes was completed in March 2018 in fulfillment of paragraph 50 of the Work Program, B: Sector Transport and Connectivity as endorsed by 28th RPC (Islamabad, 11-14 December 2018). Further, the Secretariat circulated to all Member States the Summary Report and draft Technical and Operational Plan, which were prepared, based on feedbacks of Member States (Note No. 886 dated 08.08.2018). The aforementioned documents were ensured for the planned discussions at 2nd HLWGM on Istanbul-Almaty and Bandar Abbas-Almaty routes in line with ECO Calendar of Events-2018, and also, one for 2019.

32. The Meeting also acknowledged that tariffs on the abovementioned routes were timely communicated to the Secretariat by enroute countries. Subsequently, those were consolidated, twice: (i) first, in January 2019, with consolidated tariff tables disseminated among enroute Member States on 10.01.2019 via Note No. 23 and (ii) second, in April 2019, with revised tariffs circulated on 08.05.2019 via Note No. 364. Presently, the revised tariffs need to be endorsed by enroute countries for the purpose of eventually operationalizing the Istanbul-Almaty & Bandar Abbas-Istanbul railway routes as prescribed by Turkmenbashi Declaration-2018 (para-3).

33. Given the abovementioned arrangements for operationalization, the Meeting acknowledged that, for some segments in territories of Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan, the transit transportation along the routes was ongoing. Moreover, the tariff rates in the aforementioned segments have already been unified amongst the abovementioned countries in April 2019 in the framework other than of ECO.

34. Delegate of Republic of Kazakhstan briefed the Meeting about the regular number of 10 container trains in 2018 on the route compared to just 4 in year 2017. The need for transit railway operations to deliver on the full throughput of containers along the route was stated. In addition, the endorsement of the revised tariffs along the route was indicated. A copy of the revised tariffs is attached at **Annex-VI**.

35. Delegate of I. R. of Iran emphasized upon the need to activate the route.

36. The Meeting welcomed the proposal of Delegation of Republic of Turkey to hold a separate sideline event for Istanbul-Almaty Container Train in the framework of a bilateral meeting with Iran in the days ahead.

37. The Meeting noted that paragraph 3 of the Turkmenbashi Declaration adopted by the 9th Meeting of Ministers of Transport of ECO Member States (1-3 May 2018, Turkmenistan) recommended "early operationalization and commercialization of the already existing railway

routes in ECO”. In that regard, the 2nd HLWGM was noted as overdue and therefore enroute countries were requested to seriously consider organizing the 2nd HLWGM on Istanbul-Almaty and Bandar Abbas-Almaty routes, at earliest possible.

iv. Qazvin-Rasht-Astara (Iran)-Astara (Azerbaijan) Railway Project:

38. Delegate of Republic of Azerbaijan delivered a statement providing a brief on the current developments regarding aforementioned route.

39. In regard of the railway project, the Delegation further informed about the completion of the Astara (Azerbaijan)-Astara (Iran) segment of the route and the construction of grain terminal, as follows: on the Astara-Azerbaijan) – Astara (Iran) segment, the construction of the railway line (10km in length), and also, of the terminal grain in the territory of Iran have already been completed and thus currently are operational. To date, the loading/unloading of freight from/to Iran further to countries of the Persian Gulf is intensively ongoing. Similarly, ongoing is the construction of the grain terminal. The next step plan is the construction of the oil terminal and the container terminal. For obtaining the full functioning of the Qazvin-Rasht-Astara (Iran) – Astara (Azerbaijan) railway, acceleration of the pace of the construction works along the 164km Rasht-Astara (Iran) missing link is needed.

40. The delegate of I.R of Iran informed the Meeting that the Qazvin-Rasht segment of the railway line has been inaugurated by the Presidents of the enroute countries on 6th March, 2019. For the information of the Member States, the Qazvin-Rasht segment length of the route was indicated as being 164km.

41. Upon reminder of the Secretariat to preserve coherence with previous suggestions on the transformation of the railway routes into self-sufficient economic spaces with integrated production-and-supply chains, the Meeting favored that the Qazvin-Rasht-Astara (Iran)-Astara (Azerbaijan) railway project be also included into a prospective study to be carried out by an international consultant and, for that purpose, it requested the Council of Permanent Representatives (CPR) to allocate the adequate amount for fulfilling the study.

42. The Meeting requested I.R. Iran to convey the exact date of the 5th HLWGM to review progress on the Rasht-Astara railway segment along with a field visit and, in that regard, instructed the Secretariat to liaise with relevant Iranian authorities to determine the preferable date and venue of the aforementioned event along with its site-visit in line with *ECO Calendar of Events-2018/2019*.

43. Delegate of I.R. of Iran requested the Secretariat to provide assistance in finding an appropriate financial model for financing the aforementioned project and the proposal was welcomed by the Meeting.

v. Construction of railway connecting China and Europe through Kyrgyzstan-Tajikistan-Afghanistan-Iran (KTAI)

44. The enroute Member States briefed the Meeting on the current developments in the implementation of KTAI project in their respective territories. The Delegation favored the level of the meeting be at high level, notably, Ministers level, or the level of Heads of Railways and the content be more substantiative. The Delegation of Tajikistan proposed to organize a high level Meeting specifically for KTAI at sidelines of the 15th Meeting of Heads of Railway Authorities of ECO Member States (Tehran, Iran, 2021).

45. The delegate of I.R. of Iran stressed that the KTAI project should be considered by Ministers of Transport of enroute countries of KTAI. The same has been mentioned by Tajikistan. The Secretariat reminded that the Meeting of Transport Ministers of enroute KTAI countries has been scheduled to be held in Afghanistan in 2019.

46. Delegate of I.R. of Iran, the Kyrgyz Republic and Republic of Tajikistan updated the Meeting on most pertinent issues in the progress in their respective segments. In specific terms, Delegation of Republic of Tajikistan presented a detailed report on the progress in implementing the assigned responsibilities along this route. Copies of the two Tajik presentations in this regard are attached at **Annex-VII**.

47. Delegate of the Kyrgyz Republic updated the Meeting on the latest developments, in overall, and with relevance to the aforementioned route, re-iterated the commitment to continue works on the project as agreed at the onset of year 2015 by the enroute countries.

48. The delegate of the Kyrgyz Republic confirmed that the KTAI project is being implemented under the framework of the joint arrangements and it continues as such. The Secretariat clarified the issue by drawing the Member States' attention at the need to re-confirm that the construction of Kyrgyzstan's segment of KTAI will align with the 1435mm standard gauge size.

49. The Meeting requested the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan to update the Member States about the arrangements in Afghanistan relating to hosting the Ministerial Meeting on KTAI/ 2nd HLWGM on KTAI, as per *approved ECO Calendar of Events-2018/2019*.

Agenda Item No.9

Revising ECO Railway Maps

50. The Meeting acknowledged that the 9th Meeting of Ministers of Transport (Turkmenbashi, May 2018) was updated that, in line with the decisions of the 8th Meeting of ECO Ministers of Transport (Ashgabat, June 2011), the ECO Rail Routes Map is to be revised every three years. To that end, the revised version of the aforementioned document was prepared in 2015 based on the updates of the Member States. With the passage of over three years until

present, the document was marked as requiring a major revision in the light of the updates to be provided by the Member States.

51. Furthermore, based on presentations having been delivered by UNECE and IsDB at 13th Meeting of ECO Heads of Railways (Baku, April 2017) on the “Joint IDB/UNECE project on Transport Geographic Information System (GIS)” embracing all ECO Member States, the Meeting re-iterated its request for an inclusion of ECO transport maps in the GIS initiative.

52. Noting moderate progress in the Joint IDB/UNECE Project on GIS and, at the same time, acknowledging the need to implement the mandate vested on the Secretariat by ECO Ministers of Transport and Heads of Railway Authorities, the Meeting suggested that the project works should continue as initially agreed upon by project parties.

53. Further, the Meeting requested the Member States to provide possible assistance in communicating to the Secretariat the details on the transit railway lines, e.g. investment projects, new/planned lines, high-speed railway lines (new/planned), border crossing and interchange stations, major stations. Such data is required from the Member States in order to convert it into GIS format. The Secretariat was instructed to release the maps both, in hard and soft format.

54. Upon the request of the Representative of IsDB to simplify the questionnaires, the Meeting instructed the Secretariat to closely collaborate with IsDB and UNECE in so doing.

Agenda Item No. 10

Consideration of new railway project proposals

55. The Meeting considered the new project proposals:

i. New railway route in ECO region

56. The Meeting acknowledged that a new project titled “Afghanistan-Uzbekistan-Kyrgyzstan-China” was recommended by the 29th RPC (17-20 December 2018, Tehran). During the latter meeting, Islamic Republic of Afghanistan stated its willingness to connect the eastern rail ring of Iran via the Nimruz Province at border of the Sistan-Baluchistan Province of Iran. The Kyrgyz Republic and Republic of Tajikistan both supported the proposal. Moreover, they requested that it be also discussed by a Technical Expert Group “for deliberating it as well amongst other Central Asian countries”.

57. The Meeting noted that (prior to the 29th RPC Meeting) the initial concept proposal had been considered and approved by the ECO Project Monitoring Group (PMG) on 19 November 2019 at the Secretariat premises. As a result, the proposal has, since then, been enlisted for regular oversight by ECO’s high level decision-making process i.e. Council of Permanent Representatives (CPR, monthly), sectoral Meetings of Ministers of Transport (MMT, annually), Council of Ministers Meetings (COM, annually). Based on the above prerequisite arrangements and in line with recommendation-70 of the 29th RPC (Work Program, Section B: Transport and

Connectivity), the Secretariat, in April of the current year, has prepared the project proposal outline and disseminated it among all Member States for potential feedback /comments.

58. The Meeting apprehended the proposals and suggestions of participating Delegations and, in turn, considered the concept of the above-suggested project proposal, which was presented to the Meeting by the Secretariat and, based on the details of the project proposal outline released by the Secretariat vide Note No. 387 dated 16.05.2019, approved it for implementation. Copy of presentation of project concept is at **Annex-VIII**.

ii. ECO Tourist Trains

59. Delegation of I. R. of Iran highlighted the riches of the ECO region in terms of its currently available tourist attractions, including world's most picturesque heritage sites. In terms of the tourism industry, the region, owing to its favorable geographic location, does effectively bridge the expansive markets of Europe and China with North and South of a global home. Moreover, the region has ancient historical Silk Road transcending across its vast territory of over 8 million sq. kilometers. To that effect, Railways of Islamic Republic of Iran (RAI) proposed promoting rail-based tourism transport in the ECO region with tourist trains to be dispatched from Mashhad to Ashgabat and, if there is an interest in the neighboring countries like Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan and others, the similar trains may run from Incheh-Burun to these countries' railway networks. Added to the abovementioned suggestion, the Meeting acknowledged that an agreement between Iran and Azerbaijan has been reached on launching passenger trains from Nakhchivan to Mashhad thereby setting an ECO specific tourist pattern in the region. The presented proposal has been furnished with accurate statistics and well-grounded justification of benefits for the countries that may engage, if interested, in the developing of the passenger transport by means of dispatch of tourist trains, accordingly. Copy of proposed concept proposal is at **Annex-IX**.

60. Delegation of Azerbaijan updated the Meeting about currently ongoing preparations on the Baku-Kars passenger train to be launched by the end of August 2019.

61. The Meeting considered the abovementioned proposal and found it useful for the region as it well aligns with the currently prevailing trends in the ECO countries in their strives to strengthen their relevant tourism sectors.

62. Upon deliberations, the Meeting approved the proposal of Iran to dispatch the tourist trains for Mashhad-Ashgabat and, if success, to extend such practice on other destinations as well.

iii. Consolidating annual statistics on rail transport in ECO railway networks

63. The Meeting acknowledged that, over a decade, there were proposals recorded in the previous meetings on the collection of railway-specific statistics as pertinent to ECO transport and communications.

64. The Meeting acknowledged the updates provided by the Secretariat and re-iterated the recommendation developed by the *ECO Feasibility Study on the Implementation of TTFA -2016* (p.60) on the establishment of the *ECO Observatory* as a central information center for intermodal transport and knowledge sharing. While the Meeting noted that setting up of such an “Observatory” may as well be considered under the multimodal transport, it affirmed that the collection of data/information is critical, especially, in streamlining railway-specific data and information. The latter process will, in particular, specify: (i) annual volumes of transit freight transportation on ECO specific rail-based routes, (ii) road-based carriage of cargoes to railway stations along ECO’s main routes, (iii) all-type cargo transportation within the comprehensive ECO Transport Network.

65. After the deliberations, the Meeting instructed the Secretariat (1) to undertake statistical processing of railway transport data/information with the latter to be obtained from cross-sector collaboration and (2) to release *Annual Railway Transport Statistical Year Book*. Such publication has been asked to be made available on ECO’s website for view of ECO Member States by close of each calendar year.

iv. Preparing ECO Railway Directory

66. The Secretariat has put forward a suggestion that *ECO Railway Directory* will be compiled with the objective of incorporating descriptive profiles of Railway Authorities, Transport Ministries and railway logistic companies in ECO. In specific terms, the web-generated tags indicating the name of Minister, office contacts, link to the website of the Railway Authority, name of President\Chairman\CEO of Railway Authority along with office contacts, focal contact information, address of railway-related website pages, and also, names of key liaisons for regular interaction amongst ECO Railway Authorities were suggested for upload on ECO web.

Agenda Item No. 11
Any other business

67. Delegate of I.R. of Iran suggested preparing *ECO Long-Term Railway Vision* where the medium and long-term targets in railway could be identified to serve as a clear road map in the ECO regional railway transport development.

68. The Secretariat provided clarifications by re-iterating para-14 of *Dushanbe Communiqué* (April 2018) and, with due reference to the Lapis Lazuli Railway Project enlisted thereon asked for the concurrence of the Member States to possibly elevating the status of this project as one of ECO’s key railway projects given its critical importance for the ECO region.

69. With reference to the suggestion by the Delegation of I.R. of Iran regarding the harmonization of customs formalities for international transit transport by rail the Representative of ESCAP noted that they would be glad to assist the ECO Member States to formulate the

appropriate legal instrument to harmonize customs formalities required for international rail transit.

Agenda Item No.12

Date and Venue of the next Meeting

70. Under this Agenda Item, the Meeting decided on the date and venue of the subsequent Meeting. In this regard, the Delegation of I.R. of Iran proposed to host the subsequent 15th Meeting of Heads of Railway Authorities/9th Railway Committee Meeting of TTCC in 2021 in Iran.

Agenda Item No.13

Adoption of the Report

71. Under this Agenda Item, the Meeting considered and adopted its Report. The final report of the Meeting will be submitted for endorsement of TTCC.

Agenda Item No.14

Vote of thanks and closing of the Meeting

72. Under this item, the Heads of Delegation expressed their profound gratitude to the Government of Republic of Tajikistan, particularly, His Excellency Mr. Sohrab Mirzozoda, First Deputy Minister of Transport of Republic of Tajikistan and his able team for extending genuine hospitality to the Delegations and their relentless efforts to ensure success of this important Meeting. They also thanked the ECO Secretariat for assistance and contribution towards fruition of the Meeting.

73. The Chairman announced the closing of the Meeting.
