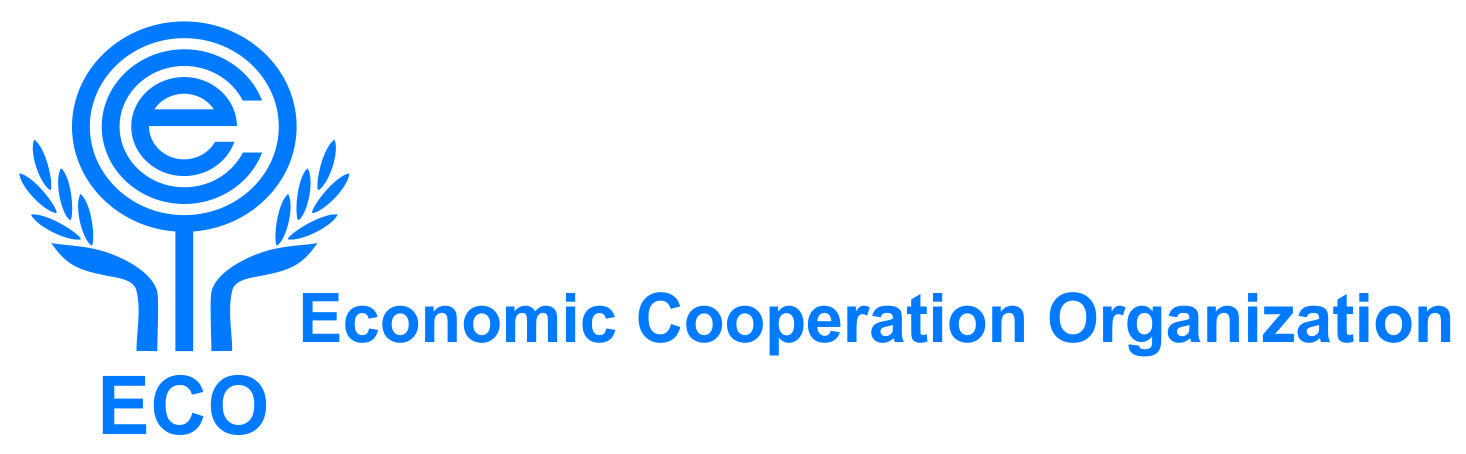
***(As of 30 Nov 2023)***



**34th Meeting of the**

**ECO Regional Planning Council (RPC)**

**Draft Working Paper**

**Transport and Communications**

Prepared by the ECO Secretariat (T&C Directorate)

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**Executive Summary**

Draft Working Paper of the upcoming 34th Regional Planning Council (RPC) scheduled for January 2024, Tehran, informs about progress attained during the reported year 2023- 2024 in the activity areas under the Directorate for Transport & Communications (TC). The structure of the present document outlines eight priority areas of TC-activity as mandated by the ECO. The performance in these activity areas in the reported year (2023-2024) has been reflected along the priorities set by ECO’s guideline documents. Thus, Sections (I-VIII) primarily focus on the targets set by ECO Vision 2025. On implementation, the recommendations embedded in the Work Program 2023, adopted by the 33rd RPC held in January 2023, were taken as key implementation tasks. In the planning for subsequent year 2024, this Directorate’s proposed activities have been shown in each section. ECO Calendar of Events (TC) for 2024 and the list of project proposals based on activities for 2024 are seen at Annexes.

**Current Status: TC Area Activities/Achievements/Proposals**

During the year 2023, performance of the ECO region in Transport and Communications have been in line with the Organization’s overall trend and guidelines embedded in ECO visions and 33rd RPC i.e. conducting the projects on connectivity, organizing coordination meetings, follow up of projects, capacity building and enhancing resilience of transport and connectivity in the region as well as development of ICT Cooperation. The TC has taken tangible steps to conduct targeted steps to materialize some of the plans and projects as well as organizing the planned coordination meetings on Maritime, Road and Rail, Civil Aviation, Customs and Information and Communications Technology (ICT) sectors and also has continuously assisted in smooth conduct of transit operations in the ECO Member States. These efforts have been quite effective and resulted in full re-opening of the transit routes of the region and in particular the Central Asian region.

**On the ECO Events Calendar:** the ECO Secretariat has successfully conducted\ participated the following events virtually including the events that were mandated by the 33rd RPC.

**List of meetings\events organized or participated by TC Directorate in 2023**

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **No** | **Name of Event** | **Date** | **Necessary Action** |
|  | International Seminar Trade and Connectivity- Western Neighborhood of Pakistan (National Defense University, Islamabad) | 25 January, 2023 | Participated-Virtual |
|  | Regional Forum on Sustainable Development for the UNECE Region (UNECE) | 29 Marc, 2023 | Participated-Virtual |
|  | ECE/ITC - Group of Experts on the Operationalization of e-CMR (UNECE) | 3 April, 2023 | Participated-Virtual |
|  | Ad Hoc Committee on Legal Affairs and International Cooperation of OTIF (Berne) | 19 April, 2023 | Participated-Virtual |
|  | Coordinating Meeting with Ministry of Transport of Uzbekistan on organizing of the 12th ECO Ministerial meeting | 24 May, 2023 | Held- Virtual |
|  | 2nd Meeting of ECO- UNECE Coordination Comm. on Trans Caspian Corridors (Istanbul) | 6-7 June, 2023 | Held |
|  | Expert Group Meeting on the Implementation of the Vienna Programme of Action, UNESCAP (Almaty) | 7-8 June, 2023 | Participated - Virtual |
|  | 13th Meeting of HLWG on ITI Railway Corridor (Istanbul) | 8 June, 2023 | Held |
|  | High Level Experts Group Meeting on Information and Communication Technology (Tehran) | 12 July, 2023 | Held |
|  | 3rd ECO Ministerial Meeting on ICT (Tehran) | 13 July, 2023 | Held |
|  | 8th Customs Committee of TTCC (Baku) | 19 July, 2023 | Held |
|  | 3rd Meeting of ECO- UNECE Coordination Comm. on Trans Caspian Corridors (Baku) | 25-26 July, 2023 | Held- Virtual |
|  | Meeting with the International Consultant  on the ECO Gate Project | 15 August, 2023 | Held - Virtual |
|  | The High-Level Euro-Asia Regional Review Meeting of Vienna Program of Action for the Landlocked Developing Countries (Bangkok) | 22-23 August, 2023 | Participated |
|  | ECO Secretary General virtual meeting with Minister of Transport of the Republic of Uzbekistan | 31 August, 2023 | Held -Virtual |
|  | Thirty-sixth session of the Working Party on Transport Trends and Economics ( Geneva) | 4-6 September, 2023 | Participated- Virtual |
|  | Workshop on Container Packing and Handling (CTU Code) -Aktau | 20-21 September, 2023 | Held |
|  | 1st High Level Working Group Meeting on Tajikistan-Uzbekistan-Turkmenistan-Iran-Türkiye (TUTIT) Multimodal Corridor (Dushanbe) | 21 September, 2023 | Held |
|  | Webinar on Advanced Big Data Processing Algorithms for Data Centers and Fiber Optic Lines | 26 September, 2023 | Held |
|  | 1st Meeting of Consultative Group of TIR Associations of ECO (ECO – TIRACG) | 2 October, 2023 | Held - Virtual |
|  | 27th COM Meeting, Shusha, Azerbaijan, | 8-9 October, 2023 | Participated |
|  | Meeting with representatives of IsDB and international consultant of ECO Gate project | 18 October, 2023 | Held - Virtual |
|  | ECO Gate inception Meeting | 23 October, 2023 | Held - Virtual |
|  | Senior Officials Meeting of the 12th Ministerial Meeting on Transport (Tashkent) | 1 November, 2023 | Held |
|  | 12th Ministerial Meeting on Transport (Tashkent) | 2 November, 2023 | Held |
|  | SG Participation at Conference on Sustainable Transport: Contribution to Sustainable Development" in Ashgabat | 26 November, 2023 | Participated- Virtual |
|  | 10th Meeting of TTCC (Baku, Azerbaijan) | 27 November, 2023 | Held |
|  | 4th Meeting of ECO- UNECE Coordination Comm. on Trans Caspian Corridors (Baku) | 11 December, 2023 | Participated- Virtual |

**LEGAL FRAMEWORK: TTFA**

**Priority Area No.1:**

**Implementation of Transit Transport Framework Agreement (TTFA)**

* **ECO Vision 2025 approach and target**

**ECO Vision** envisages that “administrative procedures and controls in inter-regional transport will be streamlined and simplified within the framework of the TTFA.” (ECO Vision 2025, Expected Outcome (v), p.4).

1. The “full implementation of the Transit Transport Framework Agreement in ECO” has been identified as the prerequisite for attaining the goals of the ECO Vision (ECO Vision 2025: Section II: Policy Environment, p.3).
2. According to the Turkmenbashi Declaration of May 3, 2018, the Member States should strive “to speed up the implementation process of the Transit Transport Framework Agreement (TTFA) in the ECO rail and road networks, to facilitate cross-border transit transport and in line with international frameworks on transport, remove non-physical barriers entailing from excessive administrative formalities and hurdles arising in transit transportation in the region” (paragraph-1, Turkmenbashi Declaration, 3 May 2018).
3. **The Midterm Review of ECO Vision (Nov. 2021)** envisaged fund-raising “Forum” should be organized, by ECO-TDB in collaboration of ECO Secretariat, as early as possible, to mobilize funds through national and international financial institutions/banks, particularly for rehabilitation of existing railways and road links as well as construction of new railways. In the same spirit, the ECO-TDB may be mandated to facilitate transfer of resources/payments related to regional connectivity and ECO transit transport infrastructures.
4. **The Midterm Review of ECO Vision (Nov. 2021)** envisaged assisting the Member States to join relevant international instruments for transit facilitation, including Agreement concerning the International Carriage of Dangerous Goods by Road (ADR) and Agreement on the International Carriage of Perishable Foodstuffs and on the Special Equipment to be used for such Carriage (ATP).

* **TTFA Background:**

1. The ECO Transit Transport Framework Agreement (TTFA) is the legal backbone of the “Programme of Action for ECO Decade of Transport and Communications (97-2007)”, which was endorsed by ECO Summit (13-14 March 1997, Ashgabat). As the basic document on transport within the region, the TTFA was signed in May 1998 and entered into force in May 2006. Eight Member States are parties to the TTFA. However, Turkmenistan has signed the agreement and the Republic of Uzbekistan is in process and yet to join.
2. Ever since, the Transit Transport Co-ordination Council (TTCC) assumed the mandate to ensure the implementation of the TTFA. To date, TTCC has held ten main meetings coupled with meetings of its four technical committees and auxiliary bodies.

* **Recent developments on TTFA:**

1. The 33rd RPC requested the Member States to fully implement the ECO Transit Transport Framework Agreement (TTFA) along with all its annexes, and also fulfill their commitments / proceedings as per the provisions of TTFA.
2. The Council repeated its request to Turkmenistan to deposit its “Instruments of Ratification of TTFA” at the ECO Secretariat to become its party as early as possible.
3. The Council reiterated its request to the Republic of Uzbekistan to expedite domestic procedures for accession to the TTFA and periodically inform the Member States about its efforts.
4. The Council welcomed the offer of the Republic of Azerbaijan to host the 10th Meeting of the TTCC and the 8th Customs Committee of the TTCC back to back with ECO Council of Heads of Customs Administrations in 2023.
5. The Council welcomed offer of the Islamic Republic of Iran to host the 9th Meeting of the Railway Committee/ 15th Meeting of Heads of Railway by the second half of 2023 and also requested the Member State/Secretariat to organize the 7th Insurance Committee of the TTCC.
6. The Council requested the Member States to consider acceding to major international transport facilitation mechanisms and legal instruments, such as the e-TIR and e-CMR, Agreement concerning the International Carriage of Dangerous Goods by Road (ADR) and Agreement on the International Carriage of Perishable Foodstuffs and on the Special Equipment to be used for such Carriage (ATP) and participate in the ongoing negotiations for development of new international legal frameworks on transport cooperation in line with the arrangements to be reached by ECO Secretariat in collaboration with relevant international bodies including IRU and IsDB and UNECE.
7. The Council requested the Member States to send their updated maps and information on Rail & Road to the Secretariat for enabling publication of the new Maps by 2023.
8. The 10th Meeting of the TTCC held in Baku considered and approved the reports of technical committees of TTCC: (i)The Report of the 14th Meeting of Heads of ECO Railway Authorities /8th Meeting of Railway Committee (June 20-21, 2019); (ii)The Report of the 10th Meeting of the Road Committee (virtually July 5, 2022); (iii)The Report the 7th Meeting of the Customs Transit Committee (virtually August 17, 2021); (iv)The Report of the 8th Meeting of the Customs Transit Committee (19 July 2023)

* **Progress and recent developments on the TTFA implementation since 33rd RPC**

1. The 8th Meeting of the Customs Committee of TTCC was held on 19 July 2023 in Baku and chaired by Azerbaijan, in which various initiatives were approved.
2. The 10th Meeting of TTCC was hosted by Azerbaijan on 27 November, 2023.
3. The 15th Meeting of the ECO Heads of Railway Authorities and the 9th Meeting of the Railway Committee of the TTCC to be hosted by Iran on 13-14 November, 2023, was postponed due to the lack of quorum.
4. Tashkent Declaration adopted by the 12th ECO Ministerial Meeting on Transport (1-2 November, 2023, Tashkent) invited Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan to accede to the Transit Transport Framework Agreement (TTFA) and stressed the necessity of its full implementation by all the Member States for the economic development of the ECO Region.
5. Turkmenistan has recently started the process of ratification of TTFA.
6. Uzbekistan has also started the internal process to sign the TTFA. The final Communique of the 16th ECO Summit in Tashkent (9 November, 2023) has welcomed the accession of Uzbekistan to the TTFA.
7. Islamic Republic of Iran has prepared a “Draft Modalities for Implementation of Article 7 of the ECO Transit Transport Framework Agreement (TTFA)” and is circulated to the MS for their views. So far no comment has been received.

* **TTFA expected outcomes for 2024 and the Secretariat’s recommendations:**

1. The Parties may be requested to fully implement the provisions of the TTFA to enhance cooperation and facilitate transit transport and avoid any practice in breach of their commitments.
2. On accession to TTFA, Turkmenistan may be requested to deposit its “Instruments of Ratification of TTFA” to become its party as early as possible and The Republic of Uzbekistan may expedite signing and ratification of the Agreement.

1. The 15th Meeting of the ECO Heads of Railway Authorities, the 9th Meeting of the Railway Committee of the TTCC and the 11th Meeting of Road Committee of TTCC will be organized by 2024.
2. Member States may consider acceding to major international transport facilitation mechanisms and legal instruments by 2024, such as the e-TIR and e-CMR, Agreement concerning the International Carriage of Dangerous Goods by Road (ADR) and Agreement on the International Carriage of Perishable Foodstuffs and on the Special Equipment to be used for such Carriage (ATP) and participate in the ongoing negotiations for development of new international legal frameworks on transport cooperation inline with the arrangements to be reached by ECO Secretariat in coordination with relevant international bodies including IRU and IsDB and UNECE.
3. Member States may consider to provide their comments and proposals on the Draft “Modalities for Implementation of Article 7 of the ECO Transit Transport Framework Agreement (TTFA)” suggested in June, 2023 by Iran and may recommend an online meeting for discussion on the Draft.
4. The Council may welcome the establishment of the Multimodal Committee as auxiliary body for the TTCC as per the decision of the 10th TTCC.
5. Member States may be requested to host the meetings of Insurance (7th) Committees of the TTCC as well as the Meeting of consular officials.

* **Conclusions on the implementation of the TTFA**

1. The TTFA Parties commit themselves to fully implement the TTFA’s provisions, particularly, on road transit, which, in practice, most commonly face instances of incompliance with TTFA’s provisions, especially on visa and cross border facilitation. In regard of procedural matters of TTFA, Turkmenistan and the Republic of Uzbekistan are requested to consider finalizing the procedural matters.
2. **RAILWAY TRANSPORT**

* **Latest decisions (of the 33rd RPC):**

1. The Council commended obtaining “Standing Observer Status at the Ad hoc Committee on Legal Affairs and International Cooperation Committee of Intergovernmental Organization for International Carriage by Rail (OTIF) by the Secretariat and requested the Council of Permanent Representative to support participation of the Secretariat in the relevant Meetings.
2. The Council encouraged the Member States to cooperate in establishing a data exchange system for railway services to facilitate transit and reduce customs formalities and in this connection the Council also requested the Secretariat to consider organizing technical workshops.
3. The Council requested the en-route Member States to regularly provide the Secretariat with their Statistical Annual Report on the bilateral and transit operations of the railway sector to enable monitoring the transport operations.
4. The Council requested the Secretariat to organize Training Courses/Workshops on Safety and Security Aspects of Transportation particularly in Maritime Road and Railway Sectors and requested the Member States to support Secretariat’s initiative in this regard.

**Priority Area No. 1:**

**Project: “Railway between Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan and Iran (KTI Railway)”**

* **ECO Vision 2025 approach and target**

1. ECO Vision’s target pertaining to the aforementioned project is“to maximize transport connectivity” (Section B: Transport and Connectivity: Strategic Objective (I)).
2. Policy approach is “to cooperate on transit related policy issues through increasing the efficiency” (Vision 2025, Section: Policy Environment, paragrpah-2).
3. ECO Vision’s expected outcome in this area is “to develop and support transport-related facilitative harmonized regulatory framework” (ECO Vision 2025, Section III: Expected Outcomes: Outcome (iii).
4. **The Midterm Review of ECO Vision (Nov. 2021)** envisaged fund-raising “Forum” should be organized, by ECO-TDB in collaboration of ECO Secretariat, as early as possible, to mobilize funds through national and international financial institutions/banks, particularly for rehabilitation of existing railway and road links as well as construction of new railway tracks. In the same spirit, the ECO-TDB may be mandated to facilitate transfer of resources/payments related to regional connectivity and ECO transit transport infrastructures.

* **Project background:**

1. The project’s first milestone was realized through the official launch of the container train test on 3 December 2014.
2. The project’s goal is to connect the Republic of Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan and the Islamic Republic of Iran to the International North-South Transport Corridor (***INSTC***) and develop “a replicable model of the common corridor management mechanism in order to bring in greater efficiency in the ECO railway network”.
3. The project’s economic impact will be 10 million tons freight throughput per annum via the KTI railway.

* **Latest developments on the KTI Railway project:**

1. The meeting of Heads of Railways of en-route countries on the commercialization of the KTI Railway decided that this project will develop and install the regional Corridor Management Mechanism (CMM) via the Corridor Management Entity-CME (paragraph-15, sub-paras (i-ii), Report of Meeting of HRA, 6 February 2017, Tehran).
2. The Turkmenbashi Declaration required the “early operationalization and commercialization of those rail routes already in place” (paragraph-3, Turkmenbashi Declaration, 3 May 2018). As with that reference, the KTI railway route exists since 2014.
3. During the Trilateral Review Meeting (28 October 2020), the en-route countries agreed that the future phases of the Study Project should be resulted in transforming the present KTI Railway corridor into an economic corridor with its all necessary pre-requisites, including, inter alia, developing economic hubs/zones at the areas adjacent to the border crossing points of KTI route, keeping in mind the Khorgos, the especial trade zone/dry port on the Kazakhstan-China border, as one of the best practices in the region.
4. The Study project on Commercialization of the KTI Corridor was completed in 2021 and “MoU among the Railway Administrations of the Republic of Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan and Islamic Republic of Iran on the implementation of KTI Railway Freight Corridor” was signed on the sidelines of the 15th Summit in Ashgabat (as the Corridor Management Mechanism) on 26 November 2021.
5. A Permanent Working Group on KTI Railway corridor (PWG-KTI) was established and First Meeting of the PWG-KTI was held on 27 December, 2021. The meeting reviewed latest developments and the recommendations/decisions to formulate the mechanism\roadmap regarding the promotion and commercialization of the KTI corridor. It was also decided to establish a **“Sub-Working Group”** with the participation of public and private sectors including freight forwarders and other relevant stakeholders to discuss and finalize the mechanism/roadmap for commercialization of the KTI corridor, including the finalization of tariff rates among the en-route countries.
6. First Meeting of the Sub-Working Group for Commercialization of the KTI Corridor was held on 12 October 2022. The meeting deliberated, inter alia, the ways and means for the formulation of the mechanism/roadmap for commercialization of the KTI corridor and finalization of tariff rates among the en-route countries.
7. The 33rd Council may recommend converting the Small-sized Project into Big-sized Project on “Development of Economic Corridors along the KTI Railway” and also requested the ECO Secretariat to approach the relevant financing institutions\agencies\banks to attract partnership and financial and technical assistance to the project.
8. The 33rd RPC requested the ECO Secretariat, UNESCAP and ISDB to continue their secretarial, technical and financial support for further commercialization, digitalization, harmonization and simplification of customs procedures along the KTI Corridor.
9. The 33rd RPC requested the en-route Member States to implement the Action Plan of the First Sub-Working Group for commercialization of the KTI Corridor including, among others, establishment of relevant website and circulation of tariffs.
10. The 33rd RPC requested the en-route Member States to regularly provide the Secretariat with their Statistical Annual Report on the bilateral and transit operations of the corridor to enable monitoring the performance of the train services.

* **Progress since the 33rd RPC and recent developments**

1. The proposal to implement a small sized project to explore feasibility of converting ECO’s existing transit transport corridors into economic ones was endorsed by 31st Regional Planning Council (RPC) Meeting (12-21 January 2021, Teheran (virtual mode)). In specifying prerequisite arrangements for the project, the Council in particular “requested the Secretariat to conduct a small sized study project on “Development of economic corridor along ECO KTI Railway Corridor” and, recruit a specialist for implementation of the said Study Project in the first half of 2021” (paragraph-12, Priority Area 1.B. Sector: Transport & Communications, Work Programme 2021).
2. In sync with the above mandate, the Secretariat prepared and circulated the “Terms of Reference (ToR) for the recruitment of an international consultant to conduct the study. The budget of the project was envisaged by 24th Council of Ministers Meeting (COM) (paragraph-28, Report, 8-9 November 2019, Antalya) allocating the amount of up to US$10,000 in regard of a small sized project implementation. The Specialist is expected to fulfill the project’s study within the period of three months, as per above stated.
3. The Terms of Reference is circulated and posted on ECO website for public view. However so far no consultant has approached the Secretariat for conducting the study.
4. The project is also included as Pipeline Project in the “The Mechanism and Principles of Collaboration between ECO and Islamic Development Bank” to be jointly funded.
5. Establishment of Joint Free Trade Zone between Iran and Turkmenistan in Sarakhs and Incheh Boron border region of the two countries is proposed by Turkmenistan.
6. Ministry of Transport of Kazakhstan submitted draft Concept Paper to implement the projects titled "Operational assessment of the North-South International Transport Corridor, including on the eastern route of the Russia - Kazakhstan - Turkmenistan - Iran – India" and "Study on establishment of economic corridor along the Kazakhstan - Turkmenistan - Iran (KTI) Railway".

* **Expected outcomes for 2024 and the Secretariat’s recommendations:**

1. The Council may recommend\decide the 2nd Meeting of the Permanent Working Group of KTI (PWG- KTI) to consider the recommendations of the “Sub- Working Group” and the relevant Road Map of the Corridor.
2. The Council may recommend the 2nd Meeting of the “Sub-Working Group for Commercialization of the KTI Corridor” to be organized in-person in 2024 with the participation of public and private sectors including freight forwarders and other relevant stakeholders to finalize the roadmap and finalize the tariff rates.
3. The Council may recommend on elevating the Small-sized Project on “Development of Economic Corridors along the KTI Railway” to a big-sized Project including Operational assessment of the North-South International Transport Corridor, including on the eastern route of the Russia - Kazakhstan - Turkmenistan - Iran – India" and increase the requested budget, and may request the Member States to consider and provide their comments and views on the bigger project Concept.
4. The Council may request the Secretariat to approach the relevant financial institutions for partnership in the project.
5. The en-route Member States are requested to implement the Action Plan of the First Sub-Working Group for commercialization of the KTI Corridor including, among others, establishment of relevant website and circulation of tariffs.
6. The Council may request the en-route Member States to regularly provide the Secretariat their statistical annual report on the bilateral and transit operations of the corridor to enable monitoring the performance of the train services.

* **Conclusions on the activity area**

1. The en-route countries may agree that the future phases of the Study Project should be resulted in transforming the present KTI Railway corridor into an economic corridor.
2. The ToR for this project proposal is prepared and posted on ECO website for procurement of consultant to conduct the project.
3. The IsDB and other IMDBs including those interested in INSTC may be approached for co-financing of the project.

**Priority Area No. 2:**

**Project: “ECO Container Train on Islamabad-Tehran-Istanbul (ITI) route”**

* **ECO Vision 2025 approach and target**

1. TheECO Vision’s target, as specified for railway transport, is “to maximize transport connectivity” (Section B: Transport and Connectivity: Strategic Objective (I)). Policy-wise, the objective is to “facilitate regular and commercially justified operations on ECO route and modernize border crossing points”.
2. Policy approach is “providing efficient and effective transit access” (ECO Vision 2025: Section II. Policy Environment, Paragraph 3, sentence-5).
3. ECO Vision’s expected outcome for the existing railway route is “to improve regional transport transit infrastructure” (Vision 2025, Section III: Expected Outcomes: Outcome (i)),

* **Project background:**

1. The project on ITI Container Train along Islamabad-Tehran-Istanbul Railway route was initiated by the 7th Ministerial Meeting of Transport held on 17-18 April 2008, in Antalya. The overall length of this railway route is 6,543km (1,990km in Pakistan, 2,603km Iran and 1,950km Türkiye). The feasibility study was completed as per project schedule. The construction of Kerman – Zahedan Missing link was completed by Iran in 2009 and the first milestone was realized on 14 August 2009 through the test run of the ECO container train. The regular runs of container trains started on 2 October 2010 given the 30 percent reduced tariffs rates for the route. The total number of 14 commercial trains; 8 from Türkiye and 6 from Pakistan; have been dispatched since the start of the project.
2. The goal of project is to provide railway connectivity for Pakistan and Iran to reach European Railway junctures via Türkiye. In this regard, paragraph-4 of the Turkmenbashi Declaration (3 May 2018) urged: “to speed up the process of rehabilitation of the existing rail segments of the main ECO Rail corridors and routes crossing through territories of the Member States”.
3. The outcomes of the Project during the reported period 2019 include: (i) successful completion by Türkiye of Marmaray Project thus enabling rail-based passage for transit container trains to European destinations from Istanbul station; (ii) in Van-Tatvan segment: the completion of construction of the two fast high-capacity ferries for transportation on Van Lake); (iii) launch of passenger trains on Tabriz-Van segment.
4. The economic impact of the project was originally designed to be 10 million tons of freight cargo per annum.

* **Latest decisions on the ITI project**

1. All necessary preparations to run the ITI Container Train have been fulfilled: (i) unified tariffs and additional charges agreed, (ii) time tables shared, (iii) infra-related issues considered in-depth, (iv) National Focal Points on each side assigned and mandated full authority for the operation of the ITI Container Train, and (v) the inquiries on commercial freight fully responded. In May 2021, the en-route Member States reviewed the tariff rates again and considered/agreed about the new tariffs.
2. As proposed by Türkiye in 31st RPC, the title of the train was changed into ITI Cargo Train.
3. The 33rd RPC highly appreciated the resumption of the ITI train from 21st December 2021 and valued efforts of the ECO Secretariat for follow-up re-operationalization of the train in real time.
4. As per information the damaged section of the Taftan-Quetta is rehabilitated and is ready for resumption of the train (as it is suspended since the 2022 floods in Pakistan). The 33rd RPC requested the Secretariat to explore the possibility of financing of the up-gradation of Quetta-Taftan section of ITI Rail link by ECO-TDB, IsDB, ADB, World Bank or any other international financing institution. The Islamic Republic of Pakistan will provide the report of the feasibility study of the said segment to the Secretariat for onward circulation to the potential investors and financers in timely manner.
5. The 33rd RPC appreciated the Islamic Republic of Iran for conducting the 12th HLWG and while endorsing the report of the Meeting, welcomed the offer of the Republic of Türkiye to host the 13th HLWGM in person in 2023 ensuring participation of all public and private stake holders. Further, the Council requested the Secretariat to finalize the exact dates and other details in consultation with the host authorities.
6. The 33rd  RPC requested the Islamic Republic of Pakistan to expedite rehabilitation of the Taftan – Quetta segment of the ITI Railway Corridor and convey their periodically progress report to the Secretariat. The Council also requested Pakistan to include Taftan – Quetta Railway reconstruction in the CPEC priority plans for development as well as to consider construction of the Railway with Standard (European) Gauge to avoid extra trans-shipment cost at Taftan Border and facilitate easy access of international commercial wagons to Quetta. The Council was also informed by the Islamic Republic of Iran on the ongoing construction of the new Railway (standard line) in Zahedan-Mirjaveh segment.
7. The 33rd RPC requested the en-route Member States to nominate multiple freight forwarders to ensure fair competition and also extend the public facilities to more businessmen in order to enhance the trade volume in the corridor.
8. The 33rd RPC requested the en-route countries to publicize the regular ITI Train services among the business communities.
9. The 33rd RPC requested the en-route countries to implement electronic data exchange to reduce the travel time and facilitate customs formalities and transshipment at the relevant stations.

* **Recent developments and progress since the 33rd RPC:**

1. As per recommendations of the Ministerial Meetings and the 11th HLWG on ITI Train and after continuous efforts the services of the Train was resumed in December 2021 and so far 8 trains have been dispatched from Pakistan to Türkiye. The train has stopped its operation due to damage of the Railway tracks caused by floods in 2022.

1. The 13th Meeting of the High-Level Working Group on Islamabad-Tehran-Istanbul (ITI) Train was held on June 8, 2023 in Istanbul hosted by the Republic of Türkiye. The meeting discussed various aspects i.e. recent developments on the infrastructure and rolling stock capacity of en-route countries relating to ITI train specifically rehabilitation of the Zahedan-Taftan-Quetta portion, diversifying of the origination and destination stations, tariffs, time table, establishing multimodal transport using road and railway modes, cooperation with a Bulgarian transport company, nomination of freight forwarders, as well as standard operational procedures. The meeting was informed that negotiations for the construction of the Zahedan-Mirjaveh standard Railway track is in pipeline with Iranian private companies.
2. The 33rd RPC requested the en-route Member States to nominate multiple freight forwarders to ensure fair competition and also extend the public facilities to more businessmen in order to enhance the trade volume in the corridor.
3. The 13th Meeting of the High-Level Working Group on Islamabad-Tehran-Istanbul (ITI) Train (June 8, 2023, Istanbul) decided to extend the ITI Train Services to Bulgaria.
4. The 12th ECO Ministerial Meeting on Transport (1-2 November, 2023, Tashkent) commended the efforts on regularization of extension of the services of the ITI Train to Europe and called upon the stakeholders to further utilize the cargo train service for enhancing regional trade.
5. The 12th Ministerial Meeting welcomed the offer of the Islamic republic of Pakistan to organize the 14th HLWG on ITI train in 2024.

* **Expected outcomes for 2024 and the Secretariat’s recommendations:**

1. The Council may request the Islamic Republic of Pakistan to expedite construction\rehabilitation of Taftan – Quetta segment of the ITI Railway Corridor and convey the Secretariat its periodically progress report. The Council may also request Pakistan to include the Taftan – Quetta Railway reconstruction in the C-PEC priority plans for development. The Council may request the Islamic Republic of Pakistan to consider construction of the Railway with Standard (European) Gauge to avoid extra transshipment cost at Taftan Border and facilitate access of international commercial wagons easy access to Quetta.
2. The Council may request the en-route Member States to regularly provide the Secretariat their statistical annual report of the bilateral and transit operations in the corridor to enable monitoring the performance of the train services.

1. The Council may request the Member States to nominate more freight forwarders for fair competition and the facilities shall be extended to more businessmen in order to enhance the business in the corridor.
2. The Council may recommend the en-route Member States to consider multimodal transportation on the corridor and request cooperation with relevant international organizations in this connection.
3. The Council may request the en-route countries for publicizing the regular operation of the ITI Train among the business communities.
4. The Council may request Pakistan to inform well in advance dispatch of wagons and Iran and Türkiye to secure provision of necessary wagons at Zahedan Station. The Republic of Türkiye was also requested to mobilize cargo towards Pakistan destinations.
5. The Council may appreciate Türkiye for conducting the 13th HLWG and request the Islamic Republic of Pakistan to host the 14th HLWGM in person in 2024 with participation of all public and private stake holders. Further, the Council may request the Secretariat to finalize the exact date and other details in consultation with the host authorities.

* **Area conclusions:**

1. As per consultations with the relevant stakeholders, the lack of rolling stock (wagons) and containers as well as gauge difference and infrastructure deficiencies in Pakistan are among the main obstacles for operationalizing the ECO-ITI Railway Corridor. In view of the recent momentum, it is expected that the reconstruction and rehabilitation of Taftan-Quetta segments will considerably enhance the regional connectivity.
2. More freight forwarders will be involved in the train services in order to enhance trade volume among the en-route countries and beyond.
3. Operational and technical obstacles will be addressed properly to make the train service regular and standard.
4. The train services will be extended to other destinations in the region of ECO and Europe and South Asia.
5. The 14th Meeting of HLWG on ITI Train will be organized in Pakistan in 2024.

**Priority Area No. 3**

**“ECO Container Train on Istanbul-Almaty and Bandar Abbas-Almaty routes”**

* **ECO Vision 2025 approach and target**

1. Thetarget set byECO Vision for Railway transport is “to maximize connectivity by making major ECO transport corridors commercially viable and operational” (Section B: Transport and Connectivity: Strategic Objective-I).
2. Policy approach is “achieving of the maximum possible connectivity and its consequent impact on social and economic development” (ECO Vision 2025: Section II. Policy Environment, Paragraph-1).
3. The expected outcome is: “existing ECO Corridors will be operationalized and commercialized to enable increased intra and inter-regional trade” (Vision 2025, Section III: Expected Outcomes: Outcome (ii)).

* **Project background:**

1. The project titled “ECO Container Train on Istanbul-Almaty and Almaty-Bandar Abbas routes” was initiated in March 2001. Its overall length is 6103 Km (Türkiye 1,950km, Iran 2,016km, Turkmenistan 449km, Uzbekistan 732km and Kazakhstan 956km). The project’s first milestone was realized via formal launch of the container train on 20 January 2002. The “Feasibility Study on the ECO Container Train Operationalization” was completed in 2010 and approved in 2014. In 2017, project stakeholders asked to conduct an additional study on the commercialization of this route in addition to one already completed in 2010.
2. The project’sinitialgoal designed at its onset was to enable rail-based multimodal connectivity till sea outlets in Türkiye and Iran for the en-route landlocked (LLCs) countries, including Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan.
3. The Study on the commercialization of the ECO of ECO Container Trains on Istanbul-Almaty and Bandar Abbas-Almaty routes was completed in March 2018.

* **Latest decisions on the project:**

1. The 33rd RPC appreciated the Secretariat for organizing the 2nd HLWG on Istanbul – Almaty and Bandar-Abbas – Almaty Corridors and while endorsing the Report of the Meeting, requested the en-route countries to implement decisions of the Plan of Action endorsed during the 2nd HLWG held on November 07, 2022 and furnish their progress report to the ECO Secretariat timely.
2. The 33rd RPC requested, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan to expedite sharing their tariff rates and operational costs of rail transport along the corridor with the secretariat.
3. The 33rd RPC requested that one of the en-route countries\the secretariat to organize the 3rd HLWG on the Istanbul-Almaty and Bandar Abbas-Almaty Corridors in person by 2023, so that the required measures could be taken timely.
4. The 33rd RPC requested the en-route Member States to provide regularly their Statistical Annual Report on the bilateral and transit operations concerning the corridor to enable monitoring the performance of the train services.
5. The 33rd RPC welcomed the initiative of the Secretariat on the establishment of the ECO-UNECE Coordination Committee (under the auspices of WP.5) for the operationalization of the Trans Caspian and Istanbul—Tehran-Almaty Railway Corridor to further extend the Corridors to Europe and Far East in order to achieve mutual benefits and also requested the Council of Permanent Representative to support participation of the Secretariat in the relevant Meetings. The Islamic Republic of Iran proposed a multimodal corridor from Kazakhstan (Aktau port) through Amirabad/Caspian Ports of the Islamic Republic of Iran to Türkiye and requested inclusion of the proposal in the agenda of the ECO-UNECE Coordination Committee.
6. The 33rd RPC requested the en-route Member States to implement “Electronic Data Interchange” (EDI) among each other and recommended that the Secretariat may organize meetings and workshops in this regard in cooperation with relevant regional and international partners.
7. The 33rd RPC welcomed the offer of the OTIF to further enhance the existing relations and also conduct workshop on CIM-SMGS common consignment note for international railway transport and requested the Secretariat to approach relevant partners for mobilizing funds for such workshop.
8. The Second High-Level Working Group (HLWG) Meeting on the ECO Container Train on Istanbul – Almaty/Almaty – Bandar Abbas (virtually on November 7, 2022) authorized the ECO Secretariat to prepare the Draft Plan of Action for commercialization of the corridor. Action Plan circulated to the en-route Member States via ECO NV No. TC/Istanbul-Bandar Abbas-Almaty/2023/370 dated March 16, 2023 for their consideration and implementation.
9. The 12th Ministerial meeting on Transport on 1-2 November 2023 commended the organizing the 2nd HLWG Meetings on Istanbul-Almaty and Bandar Abbas-Almaty Container Trains (07 November 2022) and requested the Member States and the Secretariat to implement the recommendations and proposals of the above-mentioned meetings.

* **ECO- UNECE Coordination Committee on Almaty- Tehran – Istanbul and Trans Caspian Corridors)**

1. A “Round Table designed to take stock of the Operational Rail Capacity of the Trans-Caspian and Almaty-Istanbul Corridors” was co-organized (by ECO and UNECE) in the framework of the 35th Annual Session of the WP.5 (Working Party on Transport Trends and Economics) on 6th September 2022 (Geneva). The Session decided to establish a “Coordination Committee” (that would gather periodically in the format of a Group of Friends of the WP.5 Chair in collaboration with the ECO Secretariat) to exchange views and information on, inter alia, the technical inter-operability, establishment of a unified time schedule and tariffs for both corridors as well as development of a marketing plan. So far ECO and UNECE have jointly organized 4 Meetings of “UNECE/ECO Coordination Committee on the Trans Caspian and the Almaty-Tehran-Istanbul Corridors”.
2. The 4th Meeting of the UNECE\ECO Coordination Committee is held on 11December 2023 virtually and discussed the progress in implementation of the work plan of the corridors.

* **Recent developments and progress since the 33rd RPC:**

1. To date, the railway route is currently operational and transportation of cargo/freight in the Istanbul-Almaty & Bandar Abbas-Almaty is ongoing on demand base.
2. Establishment of Joint Free Trade Zone between Iran and Turkmenistan in Sarakhs and Incheh Boron border region of the two countries is proposed by Turkmenistan.

* **Expected outcomes for 2024 and the Secretariat’s recommendations:**

1. The Council may request the en-route countries to implement the Plan of Action endorsed during the 2nd HLWG and furnish their progress report to the ECO Secretariat.

1. The Council may request the en-route countries to host the 3rd HLWG of the Corridor back to back with the next Meetings of “UNECE/ECO Coordination Committee on the Trans Caspian and the Almaty-Tehran-Istanbul Corridors” in 2024 and also consider inviting interested countries and organizations.
2. The Council may request the en-route Member States to provide the Secretariat regularly their statistical annual report on the bilateral and transit operations in the corridor to enable monitoring the performance of the train services.

1. The Council may request the en-route Member States to implement “Electronic Data Interchange” (EDI) among each other and recommend the Secretariat to facilitate meeting and workshops in this regard.
2. The Council may take note of the project concept prepared by Kazakhstan titled as “Study on Electronic Information Exchange among Railways and Customs of ECO Member States” and may request the Member States to consider and provide their comments and views on the Concept.

* **Area conclusions:**

1. Performance of the Corridors will be analyzed and key obstacles will be identified.
2. A marketing plan, unified tariffs and EDI will be implemented regionally.
3. The Corridor will be further extended to Europe and China and efforts will be made to promote and commercialize among the regional and international business communities and other stake holders.

**Priority Area No. 4:**

**“Railway Project for the connection of China to Europe through Kyrgyz Republic, Tajikistan, Afghanistan and Iran (KTAI)”**

* **ECO Vision 2025 approach and target**

1. ECO Vision’s target is “to maximize accessibility” (Section B: Transport and Connectivity: Strategic Objective (I)).
2. Policy approach is to “achieve maximum possible connectivity” (ECO Vision 2025: Section II. Policy Environment: paragraph-1, sentence 3).
3. ECO Vision’s expected outcome is “to bridge gaps and interconnect Member Countries with neighboring regions” (Vision 2025, Section III: Expected Outcomes: Outcome (i).

1. **The Midterm Review of ECO Vision (Nov. 2021)** envisaged fund-raising “Forum” should be organized, by ECO-TDB in collaboration of ECO Secretariat, as early as possible, to mobilize funds through national and international financial institutions/banks, particularly for rehabilitation of existing railway and road links as well as construction of new Railway tracks. In the same spirit, the ECO-TDB may be mandated to facilitate transfer of resources/payments related to regional connectivity and ECO transit transport infrastructures.

* **Project background**

1. The 18th RPC Meeting (March 2008, Islamabad) welcomed the proposal of Afghanistan to initiate the project. The subsequent 1st ECO Senior Official Meeting (July 2009, Kabul) considered the details of the project proposal. Thus, the overall length of Kashgar-Herat-Sangan route was estimated at 2,346km, of which 215km in China, 194km in Kyrgyzstan, 496km in Tajikistan, 1,365km in Afghanistan, and 76km in Iran. The 1st Meeting of Ministers of Transport/Communications/Railways of en-route countries of KTAI (28-29 October 2010, Dushanbe) discussed and adopted the decisions on financing the project.
2. The Railway Route – KTAI – remains as one of the five key railway routes of ECO as reflected in the ECO Railway Network Development Plan. It seeks to provide rail-based connectivity from China to Europe through ECO countries i.e. Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Afghanistan and Iran.
3. Since 2019, the project has undergone the following developments (i) construction of Khaf - Shamtiq segment completed by Iran; (ii) construction of the 3 segments of Khaf-Herat railway-stretching from Shamtiq to Geno (Rozanak in Afghanistan) by Iran; (iii) Afghanistan’s segment of KTAI has been estimated at over 1,000km; (iv) pre-feasibility studies completed in 2014; (v) feasibility studies on Kunduz-Sheberghan (1st segment) completed in 2016; (vi) feasibility study on Sheberghan-Herat (560km) completed as per para-16 of Work Program (TC) 2019; (vii) Khaf-Herat (4th segment, 87km) divided into two phases; (viii) in regard of the 1st phase of the 4th segment (43km) funded by Afghanistan government, procurement/construction started in the first half of 2019; (ix) in regard of the 2nd phase of the 4th segment (44km) funded by Italian government, procurement and construction started during the current year. A Kazakh’s company is recruited to construct the remaining segment. The existing segment is under repair by an Iranian company between Shamtig–Heart, which was damaged during the recent political development (Taliban takeover).
4. Tajikistan’s segment of KTAI is 496km. In 2016, construction of Vahdat-Yovon segment (40.7km) was completed. Vahdat-Yovon has 3 tunnels, 8 large and medium-length bridges and 2 new railway stations, Boston and Bahor. In July 2009, during the meeting in Afghanistan of Ministers of Transport of ECO Member States, it was agreed that KTAI Railway route passes through: “Kashgar-Irkeshtam-Sarytash-Karamyk-Vahdat-Korgan Tobe (Hatlon)-Kalhazabad (J.Balkh)-Nizhniy Panj-Sherkhon-Bandar-Kunduz-Holm-Mazar-e-Sharif-Shebergan-Maimana-Bokhyz-Herat-Choysorh-Khaf-Sangan”. That is currently in its development stage of feasibility studies in relevant segments of en-route countries. Parallel in time, experts of en-route countries meet to review progress. Thus, on 8-10 December 2014 they met in Dushanbe and on 14-15 October 2015 in Bishkek. Of the overall 496km in the framework of this project, Tajikistan has already constructed 131km of the Vahdat-J. Balkhi line and, in the nearest future, Tajikistan plans to construct the 51km long J.Balhi- Nizhniy Panj railway line. The feasibility study in the territory of Tajikistan was conducted by METRA (an Iranian Consulting Company) financed by the Islamic Republic of Iran.
5. The feasibility study is yet to be fulfilled on the segment of the Kyrgyz Republic. The project is a priority for the Kyrgyz Republic as the KTAI will reduce transit time from East Asia to countries of the Middle East and South Europe and will thus stimulate utilization and conservation of affluent natural resources along the railway corridor. In 2015, in Bishkek, during the expert meeting on KTAI, the “Protocol” was signed on the allocation of financial assistance for Kyrgyz Republic, to fulfill its feasibility study. The Kyrgyz Republic has, vide Note Verbale No. 208/1 dated 7 April 2019 stated its confirmation, in response to Afghanistan’s request posted at the 29th RPC, to proceed with project works under the ECO framework and asserted its intention to participate in the Ministerial Meeting on the KTAI.

1. The project’s economic impact was designed to be 10 million tons of freight (rail/road) per annum, upon completion of construction. The project is expected to enable transit of goods from China, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Afghanistan to the Persian Gulf and Europe. Currently, the project generates employment opportunities for local workforce in areas of rail and road construction in relevant segments in en-route countries.
2. In connection with the KTAI Ministerial Meeting, the 14th Meeting of Heads of ECO Railway Authorities/8th Railway Committee Meeting of TTCC agreed that such meeting should be at high ministerial level (paragraph-45, Report).
3. The 11th Ministerial Meeting on Transport (2nd Feb 2022) stressed on the importance and need for construction Kyrgyz-Tajikistan-Afghanistan-Iran (KTAI) Corridor and also mandated the Secretariat to conduct technical meetings in this regard;

* **Latest decisions on the project:**

1. The 32nd RCP appreciated the untiring efforts and contributions of the Islamic Republic of Iran for completion of the construction of Khaf (Iran) – Shamtiq – Rozanak (Afghanistan) Railway segment of KTAI Railway in December 2020, and requested en-route Member States to complete construction of the remaining missing portions within their territories in line with recommendation-5 of the Turkmenbashi Declaration (3 May 2018). The en-route Member States confirmed theircommitment to construct the KTAI Railway align with the 1435mm standard gauge size, based on the Protocol agreed and signed among the en-route KTAI Member States, in 2015 in Bishkek, Kyrgyz Republic, and the 31st RPC requested the Kyrgyz Republic to update the ECO Secretariat about any development on construction of KTAI Railway route in their territory. The Council also highlighted the importance of involvement of China in KTAI Railway Project, and requested the interested KTAI en-route countries to host 2nd Ministerial Meeting in hybrid mode in 2022, and to consider re-structuring the project design into separate but easily workable segments, and provide the Secretariat with their suggestions in this regard, and requested the ECO Secretariat and the Member States to approach the ETDB, IsDB, ADB and AIIB to get finance for the feasibility study and construction of the missing links of the KTAI Corridor.
2. The 33rd RPC encouraged the en-route countries of KTAI Railway to complete the “missing links” remaining on their part, in line with recommendation-5 of the Turkmenbashi Declaration (3 May 2018).
3. The 33rd RPC appreciated the Islamic Republic of Iran for construction of the Khaaf- Herat (Rozanak Station) and requested the latter to construct the remaining segment to connect to Herat.
4. The 33rd RPC requested the en-route countries to consider re-structuring the project design into separate but easily workable segments, and provide their suggestions to the Secretariat in this regard. The Council also highlighted the outcome of quadrilateral meeting of the en-route countries of the KTAI Corridor in Bishkek on 14-15 October 2015 to construct the railway using European Standard Gauge (1435) and encouraged other interested countries in the region to join to the project.
5. The 33rd RPC requested ECO TDB, IsDB, ADB (CAREC Program) and AIIB to consider assistance/financing the feasibility study and construction of the missing links of the KTAI Corridor.
6. The 33rd RPC recommended the Member States and Secretariat for involvement and development of the KTAI Corridor within the framework of BRI mega project.

* **Recent developments and progress since the 33rd RPC:**

1. The I.R of Iran and Kyrgyz Republic provided the updated information regarding missing links, in response to Secretariat's Note Verbal No. 27 dated 3/2/2021. The remaining en-route Member States were requested again to provide their progress report on the construction of the railway missing links via note verbal no. 608 dated 08/06/2021.

1. In Afghanistan, repair operation of the damaged infrastructure from Shamtigh to Rozanak is underway by the by the Islamic Republic of Iran in 2022, while the construction of 140 Km Khaf - Rozanak has been completed by the Islamic Republic of Iran in 10 December 2020. The construction of the standard Railway from Rozanak to Herat (total 63km) seems to be still on hold.
2. The 140km section of the KTAI railway corridor, from Khaf (Iran) to Rozanak (Afghanistan) inaugurated on 10 December 2020 with the presence of high ranking dignitaries of the KTAI en-route countries.
3. The Fund Raising event was followed up with the I.R of Afghanistan vide Note Verbal No. 98 dated 3/2/2021. The issue has been referred to be followed up under the ECO Advocacy Programme for Afghanistan in the JPC and EAPA Section.
4. The follow up of the Fund Raising Conference is dependent on clarification of political situation in Afghanistan.

* **Expected outcomes for 2024 and the Secretariat’s recommendations:**

1. The Council may recommend the MS to consider exploring interim solutions to involve technical entities in Afghanistan in the follow-up mechanisms of the Secretariat to facilitate and speed up regional cooperation on transport.
2. The Council may encourage the en-route countries of KTAI Railway to complete the “missing links” in their relevant segments, in line with recommendation-5 of the Turkmenbashi Declaration (3 May 2018).
3. The Council may request the en-route countries to consider re-structuring the project design into separate but easily workable segments, and provide their suggestions to the Secretariat in this regard.
4. The Council may request ECO TDB, IsDB, ADB (CAREC Program) and AIIB to consider financing the feasibility study and construction of the missing links of the KTAI Corridor.
5. The Council may recommend the Member States and Secretariat for involvement and development of the KTAI Corridor within the framework of BRI mega project.

* **Area conclusions:**

1. After addressing the political ambiguities, organization of the technical meetings of en-route KTAI Railway corridor would consolidate proposals for en-route countries to see where each of them stands in completing “missing links” in their relevant segments of KTAI. Participation of potential financiers and other partners is to be encouraged. In addition, there arises a possibility of linking the KTAI railway route to adjacent railway links and lines, one option being the link to Uzbekistan’s dry port terminal at Termez.
2. The KTAI Corridor will enhance regional connectivity particularly for facilitation of transport to Europe and Persian Gulf and the rest of the world.

**Priority Area No. 5:**

**“Railway Project on Qazvin-Rasht-Astara (Iran) route”**

* **ECO Vision 2025 approach and target**

1. ECO Vision’s targetis “to maximize connectivity and accessibility” (Section B: Transport and Connectivity: Strategic Objective No. I).
2. Policy approach is “to achieve maximum possible connectivity and its impact on social and economic development” (ECO Vision 2025: Section II. Policy Environment, para-1, sentence 3).
3. The ECO Vision’s expected outcome is “to bridge the gaps and interconnect Member Countries and the region with neighboring regions to reach international markets” (Vision 2025, Section III: Expected Outcomes: Outcome (i).
4. **The Midterm Review of ECO Vision (Nov. 2021)** envisaged fund-raising “Forum” should be organized, by ECO-TDB in collaboration of ECO Secretariat, as early as feasible and possible, to mobilize funds through national and international financial institutions/banks, particularly for rehabilitation of existing railway and road links as well as construction of new railway tracks. In the same spirit, the ECO-TDB may be mandated to facilitate transfer of resources/payments related to regional connectivity and ECO transit transport infrastructures.

* **Project background:**

1. This Project is part of an important link withinthe International North-South Transport Corridor (INSTC), it connects the ECO region with Europe destinations and Russia and the latter to the Persian Gulf through the Qazvin-Rasht-Astara Railway. The throughput capacity via this Railway was initially designed at 5 million tons per annum to further expand to 10 million tons annually within the project’s subsequent five-year period.
2. The 164 km Qazvin-Rasht segment of the project was completed and officially inaugurated on 6 March 2019;
3. The feasibility for construction of missing link between Rasht-Astara (Iran) is conducted by Iran. However, the construction is yet to be completed/implemented.
4. There is ongoing negotiation in trilateral context (Iran – Azerbaijan and Russia) for implementation of the project as well.

* **Latest decisions on the project:**

1. The 33rd RPC requested the Secretariat to initiate negotiations with ECO international partners, including inter alia, UNESCAP, and IsDB for conducting a study project for commercialization of the Route.
2. The 33rd RPC welcomed the readiness of the Republic of Azerbaijan to convene the 6th HLWG Meeting on Qazvin-Rasht-Astara (Iran)-Astara (Azerbaijan) in person in first half of 2023, and as updated to be held, preferably, in second half of 2024.
3. The 33rd RPC requested the ECO-TDB and IsDB to consider financing for the missing link of the afore-mentioned corridor (Rash - Astara) and requested the ECO-TDB to provide progress report to the en-route Member State through ECO Secretariat
4. The 12th ECO Ministerial Meeting on Transport (1-2 November, Tashkent) stressed on the importance and the need for construction of missing links between Rasht-Astara (Iran) and mandated the Secretariat to conduct technical meetings in this regard.

* **Recent developments and progress since the 33rd RPC:**

1. The 5th HLWG Meeting of the Railway Corridor was held on 17 December 2019 in Tehran. The meeting acknowledged the following: (i) the 164 km Qazvin-Rasht segment of the project was completed and officially inaugurated on 6 March 2019; (ii) loading/unloading service provision for freight wagons (including containers) in Astara (Iran) terminal is intensively ongoing in the direction from/to Iran towards Baltic and CIS countries as well as to the Persian Gulf and vice-versa; (iii) construction of four different terminals in Astara (Iran) station namely grain terminal, oil terminal, general cargo terminal and container terminal are being implemented under the project to increase the freight inflow; (iv) that the only remaining segment along the project is now the 162 km of Rasht-Astara, for which, the engineering studies have already been completed, which is a great progress for implementing the project; substructure of 9 km of the beginning of the route from Rasht side has been constructed in double track, upon which one line will go to Anzali (Caspian Port) and the other line will extend to Astara; land acquisition along the Rasht-Astara segment has already been started.
2. The 6th HLWG Meeting on Qazvin-Rasht-Astara (Iran)-Astara (Azerbaijan) has been postponed. The concerned authorities of the Republic of Azerbaijan will communicate dates and other details of the meeting. The matter has been followed up.
3. The Republic of Kazakhstan has initiated project concept of “Digital Modeling for Advanced Railroad Construction and Maintenance of ECO railways on a pilot section at Resht-Astara railway” allowing to cut costs sizably using digital design simulator.
4. The Islamic republic of Iran is in the final phase of mobilizing necessary funds from local and international sources for execution of the project (Rasht- Astara rail).

* **Expected outcomes for 2024 and the Secretariat’s recommendations:**

1. The Council may request the Secretariat to start negotiations with ECO international partners, including inter alia, UNESCAP, and IsDB for conducting a study project for commercialization of the Route.

1. The Council may request that the 6th HLWG Meeting on Qazvin-Rasht-Astara (Iran)-Astara (Azerbaijan) convened in 2024 in person.
2. The Council may request the ECO-TDB to consider financing the missing link of the afore-mentioned corridor (Rasht - Astara).
3. The Council may request the en-route Member States to support the initiated concept of “Digital Modeling for Advanced Railroad Construction and Maintenance of ECO Railways on a pilot section at Resht-Astara railway” as soon as possible that would allow to cut costs using digital design simulator, and finally provide lower tariffs for users at this route.

* **Area conclusions:**

1. The project is currently ongoing in slow pace. The 6th HLWGM on Qazvin-Rasht-Astara is expected to oversee progress updates on commencement of final phase of the project while concentrating on financial aspects enabling start of construction works on the project’s last segment.
2. ECO Regional and international connectivity will be enhanced through the Corridor and will expedite regional economic integration.
3. An action Plan will be developed to help early materialization of the Corridor.

## ROAD TRANSPORT

## Priority Area No.1

## Development of ECO Road Corridors on Kyrgyz Republic-Tajikistan- Afghanistan- Iran (KTAI) and Islamabad-Tehran-Istanbul (ITI) routes

### ECO Vision 2025 approach and target

1. ECO Vision’s target is “to maximize connectivity and mobility by making major ECO road corridors operational” (Section 3B: Transport and Connectivity: Strategic Objective (I)).
2. Policy approach is to “provide for efficient and effective access to transit”, “facilitate regular and commercially justified operation of ECO corridors” (ECO Vision 2025: Section II. Policy Environment: paragraph-3).
3. ECO Vision’s expected outcome for the existing road corridors is “to improve regional transit transport infrastructure to bridge gaps”, “to encourage the Member State in their acceding to relevant regional and international legal instruments for the ease of transit transport”, “to streamline and simplify administrative procedures and controls in inter-regional transport within the framework of TTFA”, “to support more efficient customs functions and modernized customs facilities in Member Countries” and “simplify visa and consular procedures for transit and regionally and globally accepted insurance system to be activated in line with TTFA” (ECO Vision 2025, Section III: Expected Outcomes: Outcomes (i), (iv), (v), (vi), (vii)).
4. **The Midterm Review of ECO Vision (Nov. 2021)** envisages digitalization of procedures, including through capacity development programmes and application of eTIR and eCMR; etc.
5. **The Midterm Review of ECO Vision (Nov 2021)** envisaged fund-raising “Forum” should be organized, by ECO-TDB in collaboration of ECO Secretariat, as early as feasible and possible, to mobilize funds through national and international financial institutions/banks, particularly for rehabilitation of existing railway and road links as well as construction of new railway tracks. In the same spirit, the ECO-TDB may be mandated to facilitate transfer of resources/payments related to regional connectivity and ECO transit transport infrastructures.

### Background information:

1. The 8th Ministerial Meeting on Transport and Communications (Ashgabat, June 2011) decided to establish two road transport corridors; i) between Islamabad-Tehran-Istanbul (ITI), and ii) between Kyrgyz Republic, Tajikistan, Afghanistan and Iran and (KTAI). Based on the decisions of the 1st HLWGM on ITI and 2nd HLWGM on KTAI to undertake a field study, appropriate measures have been taken in this regard. IRU, a partner organization of ECO, confirmed technical and financial support for the field study where its co-sponsorship share amounting to US$30,000 was subsequently transferred to ECO’s account in two portions (2017 and 2018). An international consultant was recruited to carry out the study. Nominations of national consultants were received to provide project inputs.
2. The Secretariat has updated the Study project’s findings of which final reports have been approved at the 4th HLWG Meeting on KTAI and 5th HLWG Meeting on ITI Road Corridors on 25-26 November 2019 in Tehran along with the Annexes containing Action Plan, Visa Pilot Scheme, and a set of recommendations.
3. As per the Work Program Council, a test run of loaded trucks carrying goods under TIR Carnets along KTAI road corridor was organized (in collaboration with IRU) and commenced from the Iranian border crossing of Dogharoon on 26 July 2020. The caravan included seven trucks carrying cargo worth more than 85 thousand USD. During an official ceremony the trucks started their journey from Dogharoon with two heading for the city of Osh in the Kyrgyz Republic and five to the capital city of Dushanbe in the Republic of Tajikistan. The five trucks reached their final destination of Dushanbe on Friday, August 11 2020 while the two trucks reached Osh on Friday, August 14 2020. The Secretariat has circulated the report of the Test Run among en-route States (Note Verbal TC/KTI-Test Run Report/2020/466).
4. The Sixth Meeting of the ECO High Level Working Group on ITI (Islamabad-Tehran-Istanbul) Road Corridor, under Chairmanship of the Republic of Türkiye, virtually held on December 14, 2021.

### Latest developments on the KTAI and ITI Road Corridors

1. The 32nd RPC requested the en-route countries for implementation of the Action Plan approved by the 4th, 5th and 6th HLWGMs on KTAI and ITI Road Corridors. The Action Plan will serve as a framework for systematic monitoring of the corridors.
2. The 32nd RPC appreciated the ITI and KTAI en-route Member States, the ECO Secretariat and IRU for the successful test run of the loaded truck under TIR, conducted in 2021 and 2020 and also requested en-route Member States to implement the recommendations of the reports of the ITI and KTAI test runs as well as conduct further transport to find out the bottlenecks and impediments.
3. The ECO-ITI Road corridor was successfully activated under TIR system on 08 October 2021 on the route between Pakistan (Karachi), Iran (Mirjaveh – Bazargan BCP) and Türkiye (Gurbulakh - Istanbul) with two Pakistani trucks fully loaded on return trip as well. So far more than 10 Pakistani trucks under the cover of TIR Convention have conducted transit operations and the corridor is gradually becoming regular.
4. The 33rd Council further requested expansion of Iran-Turkey eTIR project to Pakistan to make the whole corridor digital (the three countries will introduce focal points for this activity by mid-February 2022);
5. The 33rd RPC requested for urgent expansion\restructuring of Bazargan\ Gurbulakh and Taftan–Mirjaveh BCPs and establishment of green lanes to reduce waiting time of trucks particularly for pharmaceuticals \food stuff and perishable goods and transit cargo and in this connection requested Iran to organize the 1st Technical Working Group Meeting and field visits of relevant officials of neighboring countries to discuss details of plans and programs with regard to the said BCPs by April 2022.
6. The 33rd RPC has requested Pakistan to host the 7th HLWG on ITI in 2023.
7. The 12th ECO Ministerial Meeting on Transport (1-2 November, Tashkent) stressed on the importance and the need for establishment of TIR Parks at Border Crossing Points (BCPs) and expansion of transit capacity of Gurbulakh\Bazargan BCP and other regional missing rail and mandated the Secretariat to conduct technical meetings in this regard.

### Developments and progress since the 33rd RPC:

1. In line with implementation of the Action Plan approved by the 4th and 5th HLWGMs on KTAI and ITI Road Corridors, in particular, to facilitate visa for drivers performing carriage of goods along both Corridors, so far Iran and Pakistan have acceded to the Visa Pilot Scheme for ITI and KTAI Road Corridors and exchanged list of professional transit drivers.
2. The Secretariat has established a coordination mechanism through Social Media involving all the stake holders to facilitate movement of trucks and identifying relevant challenges.
3. The Sixth Meeting of the ECO High Level Working Group on ITI (Islamabad-Tehran-Istanbul) Road Corridor, under the Chairmanship of the Republic of Turkey, held virtually on December 14, 2021 and made various recommendations to further enhance the transit in the Corridor.

### Expected outcomes for 2024 and the Secretariat’s recommendations:

1. The Council may request the en-route countries for immediate implementation of the Action Plan approved by the 4th and 5th HLWGMs on KTAI and ITI road corridors. The Action Plan will serve as a framework for systematic monitoring.
2. The Council may request ITI en-route Member States to implement the recommendations of the reports of the ITI and KTAI Test Run.
3. The Council may request the ITI en-route countries to keep the Secretariat abreast about progress and developments on the construction\development\rehabilitation of the missing links in their territories to be circulated among the Member States.
4. The Council may reiterate its request from the Islamic Republic of Pakistan to organize 7th Meeting of the High Level Working Group on ITI Road Corridor in Karachi and instruct the ECO Secretariat to coordinate with the host for date(s) and hospitality details. A special meeting of en-route Member States may be organized (back to back) to discuss the establishment of a regional MVTPL insurance (White Card) scheme for the ITI road corridor may be held via virtual means.
5. The Council may request the en-route countries of ITI to expand the corridor to international destinations and markets within Europe and China.
6. The Council may request the en-route Member States to regularly provide to the Secretariat their statistical annual report of the bilateral and transit operations in the corridor to enable monitoring the performance of the train services.
7. The Council may request Iran to organize the First Technical Working Group Meeting on the expansion\restructuring of ITI BCPs and establishment of TIR green lanes to reduce waiting time of trucks.
8. The Meeting may request the ITI en-route countries to ensure implementation of the recommendations of the relevant Plan of Action and the 6th HLWGM on ITI Road Corridor.
9. The Meeting may request Pakistan to facilitate the movement of Iranian trucks in its territory to help enhance regional connectivity and economic integration and avoid unhelpful practices.

### Area conclusions:

1. As the shortest possible route between Iran and Kyrgyzstan, the launch of the KTAI corridor would tap into the growing markets of the ECO Region. The success of the Test Run, will further push ECO-proven good practices of TIR operation toward sustainable levels both in ITI and KTAI road corridors.
2. The activation of the ITI Corridor has been a historic milestone in the ECO region and was hailed by the 15th ECO Summit on 28 November 2021 in Ashgabat by the Presidents. These strategic corridors have the capacity to connect to China and absorb a considerable portion of transit trade to and from China.
3. The launch of the KTAI and ITI road corridors under TIR Convention opens the region to trade and development and enables freight forwarders and transport operators to benefit from significant cost and time savings when transporting goods.
4. As per decision of the 12th Ministerial Meeting the Corridors will be further extended to Europe and China to enhance regional and international connectivity of the Region.

## Priority area No. 2

## Development of ECO Road Corridors on Kyrgyz Republic-Uzbekistan-Turkmenistan- Iran-Türkiye (KUTIT) and Tajikistan- Uzbekistan-Turkmenistan- Iran -Türkiye (TUTIT):

### ECO Vision 2025 approach and target

1. ECO Vision’s target is “to maximize connectivity and mobility by making major ECO road corridors operational” (Section 3B: Transport and Connectivity: Strategic Objective (I)).
2. Policy approach is to “provide for efficient and effective access to transit”, “facilitate regular and commercially justified operation of ECO corridors” (ECO Vision 2025: Section II. Policy Environment: paragraph-3).
3. ECO Vision’s expected outcome for the road corridors is “to improve regional transit transport infrastructure to bridge gaps”, “to encourage the Member State in their acceding to relevant regional and international legal instruments for the ease of transit transport”, “to streamline and simplify administrative procedures and controls in inter-regional transport within the framework of TTFA”, “to support more efficient customs functions and modernized customs facilities in Member Countries” and “simplify visa and consular procedures for transit and regionally and globally accepted insurance system to be activated in line with TTFA” (ECO Vision 2025, Section III: Expected Outcomes: Outcomes (i), (iv), (v), (vi), (vii)).
4. **The Midterm Review of ECO Vision (Nov. 2021)** envisages digitalization of procedures, including through capacity development programmes and application of eTIR and eCMR; etc.
5. **The Midterm Review of ECO Vision (Nov 2021)** envisaged fund-raising “Forum” should be organized, by ECO-TDB in collaboration of ECO Secretariat, as early as feasible and possible, to mobilize funds through national and international financial institutions/banks, particularly for rehabilitation of existing railway and road links as well as construction of new railway tracks. In the same spirit, the ECO-TDB may be mandated to facilitate transfer of resources/payments related to regional connectivity and ECO transit transport infrastructures.

### Background information:

1. The idea for establishment of the “ECO Kyrgyz Republic-Uzbekistan-Turkmenistan-Iran-Türkiye” (ECO-KUTIT) and “ECO Tajikistan-Uzbekistan-Turkmenistan-Iran- Türkiye” (ECO-TUTIT) Corridors was proposed initially by Turkmenistan during the 11th ECO Ministerial Meeting on Transport (2 February 2022) and was welcomed by the Ministerial Meeting.

1. The first session of the Working Group Meeting on the “Kyrgyzstan-Uzbekistan-Turkmenistan-Iran” (KUTI) and “Tajikistan-Uzbekistan-Turkmenistan-Iran-Türkiye” (TUTIT) Corridors, under the Chairmanship of Turkmenistan was held in hybrid mode on July 18, 2022.
2. The 33rd RPC decided to establish High Level Working Groups for policy making and implementing the project of development of the Kyrgyz Republic-Uzbekistan-Turkmenistan-Iran-Türkiye (KUTIT) and Tajikistan-Uzbekistan-Turkmenistan-Iran-Türkiye (TUTIT) road and multimodal corridors and also requested the en-route countries\Secretariat to organize the relevant meetings in 2023. The Council also approved the accession of the Republic of Türkiye to the KUTI Corridor.
3. The First Meeting of the High-Level Working Group on the “Tajikistan-Uzbekistan-Turkmenistan-Iran-Türkiye” (TUTIT) Multimodal Corridor was co-organized by the Republic of Tajikistan and the ECO Secretariat on September 21, 2023 in Dushanbe. A delegation from China also participated in the Meeting. The meeting discussed the Action Plan, tariffs, routes, infrastructure development, as well as conducting a test-run to find out the bottlenecks and challenges along the corridor.
4. The Meeting recommended to determine common and competitive freight tariffs (per container/kilometer), development of the logistics centers in specific transshipment points, exemption of user charges for a certain period of time and conduct a test run.

### Expected outcomes for 2024 and the Secretariat’s recommendations:

1. The Council may appreciate Tajikistan for hosting the “First Meeting of the High-Level Working Group on the “Tajikistan-Uzbekistan-Turkmenistan-Iran-Türkiye” (TUTIT) Multimodal Corridor” on September 21, 2023 in Dushanbe and may request the en-route countries to consider hosting the 2nd Meeting of the High-Level Working Group in 2024.
2. The Council may request the en-route MS to consider inviting China for participation in the meetings of the HLWGs of the KUTIT and TUTIT corridors.
3. The Council may request the en-route Member States of TUTIT Multimodal Corridor to implement the recommendations and outcome of the First Meeting of TUTIT Corridor.
4. The Council may request the en-route Member States to regularly provide to the Secretariat the statistical annual report of the bilateral and transit operations in the corridors to enable monitoring the performance of the train services.
5. The Council may request the Kyrgyz Republic to consider organizing of the First Meeting of the High-Level Working Group on KUTIT Multimodal Corridor in 2024.

### Area conclusions:

1. The launch of the KUTIT and TUTIT road corridors opens the region to trade and development and enables freight forwarders and transport operators to benefit from significant cost and time savings when transporting goods.
2. As per decision of the 11th and 12th Ministerial Meeting the Corridors will be further extended to Europe and China to enhance regional and international connectivity of the Region.

## Priority area No. 3

## Facilitation of border crossing procedures

### ECO Vision 2025 approach and target

1. ECO Vision’s target: “to maximize mobility by making major ECO transport corridors commercially viable and operational” (Section 3B: Transport and Connectivity: Strategic Objective (I)).
2. ECO Vision’s expected outcome of a “more efficient customs functions and modernized customs facilities in the member states will be supported” (Section III: Expected Outcomes: (vi)).
3. **The Midterm Review of ECO Vision (Nov. 2021)** envisages digitalization of procedures, including through capacity development programmes and application of eTIR and eCMR; etc.

### Background Information:

1. Article 28 (TTFA) stipulates that: “the Contracting parties shall establish a Customs Transit system for cargoes and means of transport in accordance with the relevant international Customs Conventions to facilitate movement of goods in their territories. The Contracting parties shall apply the provisions of TIR Convention amongst themselves.”
2. With the initiative of the ECO Secretariat and support of the Member States, four (4) members out of nine (9) members of the TIR Executive Committee (TIR ExB) for the period of 2023 – 2025 have been elected from ECO Region (Iran, Tajikistan, Türkiye, Uzbekistan). The TIR Executive Board (TIRExB), a subsidiary body of the TIR Administrative Committee, is composed of 9 members, each from different Contracting Parties to the TIR Convention. The TIRExB supervises and provides support in the application of the TIR procedure at the national and international levels.
3. In 2016, data/information gathered by ECO consultancy team, was reflected in the report titled “Feasibility study on the implementation of customs-transit related provisions of the TTFA”. The study resulted in the “5-year Action Plan for modernization of customs crossing borders of ECO Member States”.

1. The aforementioned Plan of Action (PoA) recommended the following implementation steps: i) modernization of the existing border crossing points’ services; ii) improvement of customs-related infrastructure; iii) strengthening of institutional and legal capacities. To implement PoA, the Member States were asked for regular updates on their measures/actions taken at cross borders. Feedback from Azerbaijan and Türkiye were received.

### Latest Decisions:

1. The 33rd RPC Meeting, the Council requested the Member States to abolish extra-ordinary PCR Test and disinfection of the cargo and trucks at the BCPs and avoid charging the relevant costs on the transit transport.
2. The 33rd RPC Meeting requested the Member States to facilitate smooth border crossing through prohibiting clearance and loading/unloading of goods at borders and transfer it to inland customs offices to avoid border congestion and long queues. The Secretariat was requested to introduce best practices in this regard to the Member States.
3. The 33rd RPC Meeting requested the Member States to avoid multiple screening and control of the cargo and passengers through establishing\installing Single Window Customs at their BCPs or joint monitoring mechanism to speed up transit formalities and facilitate smooth border crossing.
4. The 33rd RPC Meeting requested the Member States to enhance the capacity of border Crossing Points (BCPs) to accommodate more transiting trucks and enhance transit facilitation through installing X-Ray equipment.
5. The 33rd RPC Meeting underlining the equal treatment of the transiting cargo at the BCPs, the Council requested the Member States to enhance their control over truck queuing systems\mechanisms to avoid illegal and arbitrary practices.
6. The 33rd RPC Meeting requested the Member States to avoid systematic physical checks of the transports under TIR system as envisaged in the TIR Convention.
7. The 33rd RPC Meeting welcoming the initiative of Customs of Turkmenistan to establish "Green lanes" at the border customs posts, requested all the Member States to implement Green lanes at their BCPs. The Secretariat and IRU were requested to conduct necessary workshops to familiarize the Member States with best practices on TIR green lanes.
8. The 33rd RPC Meeting requested the Secretariat to approach UNECE, IRU and IsDB or any other relevant international organization for their assistance technical and financial in digitalizing the transit documents and in particular TIR and CMR, as well as holding Workshops and Training Courses by the aforesaid international organization.
9. The 33rd RPC Meeting appreciated the ongoing activities of the Secretariat to institutionalize cooperation with the International Road Union to speed up and enhance transit and transport facilitation further in the ECO Region.
10. The 32nd RPC of the Regional Planning Council requested the Member States to keep the Secretariat informed of progress in their customs improvements at their relevant border crossing points (BCPs) as per the provisions of the Action Plan.
11. The 32nd **Council** requested the Member States to consider establishing ‘TIR-EPD Green lanes’ in their border crossing points along the main ECO transport routes to facilitate the movement of general cargo particularly food stuff, medicines and essential humanitarian and rescue products.
12. Given the current situation, ‘TIR-EPD green lanes’ along main transport routes are for concerted cooperation among world nations to ensure that all freight, including goods that are currently most needed by people be delivered to destinations with no further delay.
13. The 8th Meeting of Custom Transit Committee of Transit Transport Coordination Council (TTCC) held on 19th July 2023 (hosted by the State Customs Committee of the Republic of Azerbaijan), recommended the following among others:
14. expediting the implementation of the eTIR (Annex 11 of the Customs Convention on the International Transportation of Goods under cover the TIR Convention 1975) among the Member States; Simplification and harmonization of customs procedures and documents;
15. Establishment of TIR Green Lanes at the BCPs and facilitation of TIR transit through minimizing and elimination of the physical controls/breach of seals of the TIR trucks;
16. Implementation of the Recommendations of the ECO/IDB Feasibility Study on Customs related Provisions of the TTFA and modernization of the Border Crossing Points in the ECO Region and the Plan of Action, including request to establish a Task Force Group of Customs Administrations of the ECO Member States to harmonize the transit procedures.
17. Relocation of customs controls from borders to inland customs offices to avoid congestions;
18. Digitalization of transport documents and procedures;
19. Provide proper warehousing facilities and cold storage for the storage of goods at the transiting territories where internal regulations/laws are applicable;
20. Provide adequate parking space with maintenance, fueling, reliable internet and telecommunication services for vehicles awaiting goods clearance adjacent to BCPs where internal regulations/laws are applicable;
21. Facilitate quick and efficient transit of goods particularly the medical and perishable goods through allocation of special lanes at the BCPs.
22. Requested Secretariat to arrange intergovernmental visits to BCPs of Member States for observation of developments and cooperation.
23. The Republic of Kazakhstan initiated project concept “Electronic Information Exchange Among Railways and Customs of ECO Member States”. The Project proposal will be submitted to Member States for consideration.
24. The First Meeting of the TIR Associations Consultative Group (ECO- TIR ACG) was convened virtually on 2nd October and discussed various challenges of transit operation including unnecessary checks and necessity of removal of permit system and facilitation of Visa.
25. The 12th ECO Ministerial Meeting on Transport (1-2 November, 2023, Tashkent) encouraged the Member States to optimize border crossing capacity through application of joint or coordinated border control, establishing ‘Green lanes’, and transferring custom formalities relating to import, export and transit from borders to inland customs offices.
26. The 12th ECO Ministerial Meeting on Transport called upon the Member States to enhance their efforts for adoption of technological and smart solutions to ensure the smooth flow of goods in transit and mandate the ECO Secretariat to pro-actively conceive and implement related projects and capacity building initiatives on transport technologies, smart transport and digitalization in collaboration with international partners.

### Expected outcomes for 2024 and the Secretariat’s recommendations:

1. The Council may request transit facilitation at all borders and avoiding any practice of closure of the BCPs to secure the unhindered passage of trucks and drivers throughout the region and beyond.
2. The Council may request the Member States to establish ‘TIR-EPD green lanes’ in their border crossing points along the main ECO transport routes. The Member States may keep the Secretariat informed of progress in this regard as well as any progress in their customs improvements at their relevant border cross points (BCPs).
3. The Council may appreciate the efforts of the Secretariat and IRU in jointly organizing the first meeting of the “Consultative Group of ECO TIR Issuing and Guaranteeing Associations” (ECO-TIRACG) on 02 October and may request the ECO-TIRACG to participate in the relevant meetings and contribute to development of connectivity in the region. The Council may also welcome the offer of the Islamic Republic of Iran to host the 2nd Meeting of the ECO TIRACG in 2024.
4. The Council may request the Secretariat to approach IRU and IsDB or any other relevant international organization for their assistance in digitalizing the transit including through implementing eTIR and eCMR.
5. The Council may request the Member States to accede to eTIR and eCMR protocols to speed up digitalization of transit in the region.
6. The Meeting may also request the MS to volunteer for organizing the 9th Meeting of the Customs Committee of TTCC in 2024.
7. The Council may also request the Secretariat to institutionalize cooperation with the International Road Union to further speed up and enhance transit and transport facilitation in the ECO Region.

### Area conclusions:

1. The Covid-19 Pandemic has exacerbated the need for digitalization of transit transport and facilitation of BCP procedures in the ECO Region. Although the cooperation with international organizations has resulted in transit facilitation so far, the urgency of the situation requires for institutionalized cooperation with the relevant international specialized bodies particularly IRU.
2. Up-gradation of BCPs and establishment of Green Lanes and digitalization of transit transport shall become a priority in the region to facilitate trade and mitigate the risks of pandemic.

1. Considering the increase in the demand for smooth passage of the trucks through Bazargan \Gurbolakh BCP, it is expected that the border to be restructured and rebuilt by the Iran and Türkiye as soon as possible.

## Priority area No. 4

## Project: Joint IDB/UNECE Project on Transport Geographical Information Systems (GIS)

### ECO Vision 2025 approach and target

1. ECO Vision’s target is “to maximize mobility by making major ECO transport corridors operational” (Section B: Transport and Connectivity: Strategic Objective (I)).
2. ECO Vision’s expected outcome: “regional transit transport infrastructure will be improved to bridge gaps and interconnect the Member States and the region with neighboring regions to reach international markets” (ECO Vision 2025: Section III: Expected Outcomes: Outcomes (i)).

### Background information:

1. The IsDB representative presented the concept project proposal to launch the Joint IDB/UNECE Project on Enhancing Regional Transport Infrastructure Connectivity and Establishment of a Transport Geographical Information System (GIS) Database for the ECO Member States to the 13th Meeting of ECO Heads of Railway Authorities (Baku, April 2017).
2. The meeting requested inclusion of ECO transport maps in the GIS initiative. The meeting requested member countries through ECO Secretariat to nominate national consultants/focal points for contribution to GIS initiative. The member states were also urged to provide necessary information/data and to actively participate in the meeting to be organized by IDB/UNECE under this initiative.
3. The project entails from the IsDB 10-Year Strategic Framework and documents of ECO and UNECE focusing on regional connectivity as one of strategic objectives of both. The design and development of transport infrastructure networks is the key goal of the project. The design of regional land and land-cum-sea transport network incorporating rail, road, maritime and inland water routes will be fulfilled under project. Major seaports, ferry links, intermodal terminals, dry ports and border-crossing points along selected routes will be key points of network. This will help partner institutions to develop priority sub-regional programs for coordinated actions among multiple partners to bridge the missing links and enhance capacity and efficiency of regional transport networks.
4. The project’s goal is to create a comprehensive mapping data base of the ECO region’s transport, to improve existing networks through the following activities: i) establishment of regional GIS database; ii) preparation of the list of priority investment projects; iii) preparing regional study on “Benchmarking transport construction and maintenance costs”; iv) preparing regional study on the “Establishment of multi-donor RCI financing facilities”.
5. The project has been structured in two phases: phase-1 contains components 1 and 2; it will collect data for existing transport networks and identify potential projects for investment. Phase-2 (Transport GIS application) will facilitate analyses, dissemination and visualization of data/information on transport infrastructure, including international transport operations and trade flows in Member States. This task will be fulfilled by customizing GIS software and establishing GIS database of transport infrastructure networks and infrastructure projects in addition to database on cargoes/trade flows.
6. The 9th Meeting of Ministers of Transport of ECO Member States (1-3 May 2018, Turkmenbashi) welcomed the aforementioned initiative on GIS “as a platform for monitoring quality of transport infrastructure and regional connectivity among the ECO Member Countries”.
7. The 14th Meeting of Heads of Railway Authorities of ECO Member States (20-21 June 2019, Dushanbe) re-iterated a request for inclusion of ECO transport maps in the GIS initiative.
8. The same Meeting suggested that project works be continued as initially agreed upon by project parties and instructed that maps, soft and hard formats, be released by the Secretariat while Member States would provide the required information, including on transit railway lines, investment projects, new/planned lines, High Speed Rail (HSR), BCPs, interchange stations for GIS at UNECE and IsDB, to transform such data into GIS-adjusted maps. For the latter action, the Meeting requested IsDB and UNECE to simplify questionnaires for the ease of processing (paragraphs 51-54, Report of 14th Meeting of Heads of Railway Authorities of ECO Member States, 20-21 June 2019, Dushanbe).
9. In the course of implementation of the project the following deliverables were produced:

* International consultant recruited by UNECE.
* National Focal Points-National Consultants appointed by ECO Member States.
* National Focal Points developed actual GIS indicators.
* Two workshops have been held on the GIS initiative with participation of involved ECO Member States in previous years.
* Questionnaires of the ECO Member States on their transport infrastructure costs collected and reviewed by all of project parties during January-May 2020.
* The GIS Web plat form is operationalized:
* Web Address: <https://gis.unece.org/portal/apps/sites/#/international-transport-infrastructure-observatory>

1. Final report on the completion of the 1st phase of the joint ECO/UNECE/IsDB project on GIS titled “Benchmarking of transport infrastructure construction costs” in ECO Member States using GIS system has been prepared and finalized on 07.11.2020.

### Latest decisions:

1. The 33rd RPC appreciated the Secretariat, UNECE and IsDB for operationalization of the Geographic Information System (GIS) and requested the CPR to allocate necessary funds for sustainable functioning of the Project.
2. The 33rd RPC appreciated the Secretariat for negotiations with UNECE and IDB for the commencement of the 2nd Phase of the Project which is the “Creation of a comprehensive GIS database and related maps, including the maps of ECO Region, for displaying regional and sub-regional transport networks and geo-mapping of infrastructure projects along these networks”.
3. The 33rd RPC requested the ECO Secretariat to recruit technical staffs on temporary basis for cooperation with the project team and the Member States to follow up the GIS project and assist in devising and implementing the 2ndPhase of the project on temporary basis.
4. The 33rd RPC requested the Secretariat to consider establishing a Geographic Information System (GIS) section under Transport & Communication Directorate (T&C) for mapping of regional connectivity networks in the fields of transport (road, rail, air and maritime) and other regional connectivity initiatives of the Organization.
5. The 12th ECO Ministerial Meeting on Transport (1-2 November, 2023, Tashkent) appreciated the ECO Secretariat for jointly establishing the Geographic Information System (ITIO-GIS) platform and requested the Member States to continuously update their national data on the platform and in this context called for **establishment of GIS section** under Transport & Communication Directorate (T&C) for mapping of regional connectivity networks in the fields of transport (road, rail, air and maritime) and other regional connectivity initiatives of the Organization.

### Recent developments and progress since the 33rd RPC:

1. The inaugural meeting of the International Transport Infrastructure Observatory (ITIO) and finalization of the GIS platform (after several years of combined efforts among ECE, IsDB, ECO, and other regional organizations (ESCWA and CETMO) was held at UNECE on 06 Sept. 2022 (Geneva) in the framework of WP.5 and called upon Governments to appoint National Focal Points and start exploring its functionalities, provide feedback on their user experience and start feeding it with additional geocoded data.
2. The Observatory (ITIO) contains transport infrastructure map in Europe, Middle East and ECO Region and potentially offers a multi-stakeholder, web-based Geographic Information System (GIS) platform which hosts data on a large variety of transport infrastructure networks and nodes across different modes including road, rail, inland waterways, ports, airports, intermodal terminals, logistics centers and border crossing points. The benefits include improved communication and efficiency as well as better management and decision making.
3. All the MS have nominated their Focal Points to use the GIS platform and update and edit the relevant information on transport infrastructure and maps in their own territories. The GIS platform can be reached through the following address:

***https://gis.unece.org/portal/apps/sites/#/international-transport-observatory***

### Expected outcomes for 2024 and the Secretariat’s recommendations:

1. The Council may request the ECO Secretariat to finalize the negotiations with UNECE and IDB for the commencement of the next phases of the project including i) preparation of the list of priority investment projects; ii) preparing regional study on “Benchmarking transport construction and maintenance costs”; iii) preparing regional study on the “Establishment of multi-donor RCI financing facilities”.
2. The Council may request the Member States and UNECE and the project team to update the GIS maps with ECO’s recent maps and development plans.
3. The Secretariat has requested the project teams in UNECE, IsDB for the updated project framework to be able to follow the step-by-step implementation of project activities on the Secretariat’s side. It is agreed that the Secretariat and Member States will be provided with opportunity to update their information on the GIS System.
4. The Council may request to recruit technical staffs on temporary basis for cooperation with the project team and the member states to follow up the GIS project and assist in devising and implementing the 2nd phase of the project on temporary basis.
5. The Council may request the Member States to update their transport data on the ITIO GIs platform to provide the stakeholders proper use of the platform .
6. In pursuit of the decision of the 12th Ministerial Meeting on Transport, the Council may mandate the ECO Secretariat to establish GIS section under Transport & Communication Directorate (T&C) for mapping of regional connectivity networks in the fields of transport (road, rail, air and maritime) and other regional connectivity initiatives of the Organization.

## Priority Area No.5:

## ECO Visa Scheme for Drivers

### ECO Vision 2025 approach and target

1. ECO Vision’s target is “to maximize mobility by making major ECO road corridors operational” (Section B: Transport and Connectivity: Strategic Objective (I)). To cooperate on fundamental transit policy related issues aimed at simplifying procedures for movement of people and goods across the region (Section B: Transport and Connectivity: Section II: Policy Environment, second paragraph, p.3).
2. ECO Vision’s expected outcome: “Simplified visa and consular procedures for transit related activities” (Section III: Expected Outcomes: Outcomes (vii)). “Administrative procedures and controls in inter-regional transport will be streamlines and simplified within the framework of TTFA” (Section B: Transport and Connectivity: Strategic Objective (v)).

### Background information:

1. According to Article 12 (TTFA), the TTFA Contracting Parties had committed to grant multiple entry and transit visa valid for one year with the right to stay on the territory of each Contracting Party for 15 days in transit per each trip and for up to 5 more days in places of loading and discharge to drivers and persons engaged in international transit traffic.
2. The 19th RPC Meeting recommended organizing meetings of consular officials of Embassies of Member States. So far, five meetings have taken place. The 1st Senior Consular Officials meeting (4October 2016, Secretariat) was attended by senior consular officials from eight Member States. The Meeting approved the text of the “ECO Visa Exemption Sticker Scheme”. In the same year, the revised “ECO Visa Exemption Sticker Scheme” was sent to Member States for their inputs, by 31 December, 2016.
3. Further, the 28th RPC was informed about the need for an agreed mechanism among the TTFA Contracting Parties. The 28th Council acknowledged feedback received from the concerned authorities of the Member States, notably, Tajikistan, Afghanistan and Kazakhstan.
4. The 29th RPC (para 41) reiterated recommendations of 28th RPC asking the MSs that did not provide comments on the “ECO visa sticker scheme” to do so.
5. The 9th Meeting of Ministers of Transport of ECO Member States (1-3 May 2018, Turkmenbashi) requested those Member States that did not provide their respective comments/views on the revised “ECO Visa Exemption Sticker Scheme” to do so to enable the implementation of “ECO Visa Exemption Sticker Scheme”.
6. As no development has happened since 2016 (due to national considerations of MS), the Secretariat in partnership with the International Road Union (IRU) simplified the initial scheme and renamed it as the “Visa Pilot Scheme for Drivers” to be implemented initially only to professional drivers along the KTAI/ITI Road Corridors.
7. The Scheme was presented to the meetings of the High Level Working Groups on ITI and KTAI road corridors on November 25-26, 2019 in Tehran and positively responded by participants from transport and customs administrations.
8. So far, Iran and Pakistan have acceded to the Visa Pilot Scheme and have exchanged the list of their competent drivers to obtain Visas under the Scheme.

### Latest decisions:

1. The 33rd RPC requested the Member States to facilitate and speed up Visa procedures, provide multiple entry Visa, reduce Visa fee, extend stay duration and abolish unnecessary and pre-requirements such as invitations to further facilitate transit operations in the Region.
2. The 33rd RPC requested the interested Member States other than KTAI and ITI en-route countries to consider joining the ECO Visa Scheme for Drivers.
3. The 12th ECO Ministerial Meeting on Transport (1-2 November, 2023, Tashkent) called upon interested Member States to accede to the ECO Visa Scheme to facilitate visa issuance for drivers/train crew while minimizing the risks.

### Recent developments and progress since the 33rd RPC:

1. The meeting of the representatives of the Member States in Tehran (consular units of the Embassies) and Consular Department of MFA of the Islamic Republic of Iran of KTAI and ITI en-route countries was convened on February 9, 2020 at the ECO Secretariat in Tehran. The Meeting decided that the ITI & KTAI en-route Member States will submit their confirmations/comments, proposals and suggestions on the new ECO Visa Pilot Scheme to the ECO Secretariat within two months’ time, latest by mid of April 2020 and the same will be disseminated among the en-route Member States by the ECO Secretariat for implementation. The minutes of the meeting along with the request to submit their comments have been circulated among en-route Member States (NVs TC/2020/99, TC/KTAI-ITI/2020/245 and TC/ITI-KTAI/2020/294).
2. The Islamic Republic of Iran and Islamic Republic of Pakistan have officially accepted the terms of the Scheme on a reciprocal basis and has exchanged the list of the approved drivers. The acceptance and the drivers list have been circulated among Member States.
3. The Republic of Türkiye has in principle agreed to the terms of the Scheme. The acceptance letter has been circulated among Member States (NV No. TC/ITI-KTAI/2020/476).
4. The Kyrgyz Republic has provided a self-explanatory Note Verbale conveying a proposal on the Scheme for the consideration of Member States. The Note requests the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan to consider reducing the Transport Visa fee and increasing the validity to one year. It also requests the Islamic Republics of Afghanistan and Iran to consider issuing Multiple Visa entries for assigned drivers. The Note has been circulated among Member States (Note Verbale TC/ITI-KTAI/2020/501).
5. The lengthy Visa formalities in some of the Member States (and in particular CIS countries) still poses as bottleneck to the development to of transport in the region that negatively affect the welfare of the people of the region.

### Expected outcomes for 2024 and the Secretariat’s recommendations:

1. The Council may request all the Member States, (except for Iran, Kyrgyz Republic, Pakistan and Türkiye) to accede and implement the Visa Pilot Scheme to help further facilitation of visa procedure for the drivers of the MS.
2. The Member States may be requested to further facilitate the Visa formalities and avoid unhelpful practices that disturb the smooth transit in the region.
3. The Meeting may recommend organization of the Consular Officials Meeting to discuss latest development and cooperation on Visa issues.

### Area conclusions:

1. Simplification of visa issuance for drivers and related personnel will improve one of the major impediments in smooth transit road traffic among ECO Member States. It requires decisive action and adequate decision making by involved Member States.

## Priority Area No.6:

## Public Private Partnership:

## ECO-TIR National Associations Consultative Group (ECO-TIRACG)

### ECO Vision 2025 approach and target

1. ECO Vision’s target: “to maximize mobility by making major ECO transport corridors commercially viable and operational” (Section 3B: Transport and Connectivity: Strategic Objective (I)).
2. ECO Vision’s expected outcome**: “**Administrative procedures and controls in inter-regional transport will be streamlined and simplified within the framework of TTFA” (ECO Vision 2025: Section III: Expected Outcomes: Outcomes (v).

### Background information:

1. The 11th Ministerial Meeting on Transport (Virtual, February 02, 2022) assigned the ECO Secretariat to work with IRU to establish the Consultative Group of ECO TIR Issuing and Guaranteeing Associations with the purpose of providing non-binding assistance and to establish constructive dialogue with relevant bodies of ECO, notably the ECO’s “Transit Transport Coordination Council” (TTCC), by providing the perspective of the private sector, represented by IRU and its TIR Associations, on matters related to customs, international trade and international transport.
2. The 12th ECO Ministerial Meeting on Transport (1-2 November, 2023, Tashkent) highlighted the role of private sector and the freight forwarders and transport operators in development and strengthening connectivity in the Region and commended the establishment of ECO-TIR Associations Consultative Group (ECO-TIRACG).

### Latest decisions:

1. The 33rd RPC welcomed the establishment of the ECO TIR Associations Consultative Group (ECO- TIRACG) and appreciated the Secretariat and IRU for their constructive and leading role in this regard and requested the relevant Associations to organize its first meeting in the first half of 2023.

### Recent developments and progress since the 33rd RPC:

1. The First Meeting of the ECO TIR National Associations Consultative Group (ECO-TIRACG) was held virtually on 2 October 2023. The meeting was attended by the 10 TIR issuing and guaranteeing associations of ECO region including ACCI (Afghanistan), ABADA (Azerbaijan), ICCIMA (Iran), KAZATO (Kazakhstan), AIRTO-KR (Kyrgyzstan), PNC-ICC (Pakistan), ABBAT (Tajikistan), TOBB (Türkiye), THADA (Turkmenistan), AIRCUZ (Uzbekistan), International Road Transport Union (IRU) and the ECO Secretariat.
2. The Meeting recommended to establish TIR or TIR-EPD Green Lanes/Windows at their border crossing points; to observe and fully implement the provisions of the TIR Convention and integrate TIR in their customs risk assessment system as a risk alleviating feature to prevent systematic physical controls of vehicles moving under TIR; to transfer export and import formalities from borders to inland customs offices; to establish e-queuing systems at borders and prioritize vehicles moving under TIR system as recommended by Harmonization Convention (1982) and to expedite the implementation of the visa scheme, approved by ECO for ITI and KTAI corridors, and expand it to the whole region.

### Expected outcomes for 2024 and the Secretariat’s recommendations:

1. The Council may appreciate The Secretariat and IRU for functionalizing the Group and may recommend active participation of the Group in the relevant ECO Transport related meetings.

1. The Council may appreciate the proposal of the Islamic Republic of Iran to host the 2nd Meeting of ECO TIR National Associations Consultative Group (ECO-TIRACG) in 2024.

### Area conclusions:

1. Private sector institutional involvement in development of transport tin the Region will be enhanced.

## Priority Area No.7:

## Public Private Partnership:

## ECO Freight Forwarders Association

### ECO Vision 2025 approach and target

1. ECO Vision’s target: “to maximize mobility by making major ECO transport corridors commercially viable and operational” (Section 3B: Transport and Connectivity: Strategic Objective (I)).
2. ECO Vision’s expected outcome**: “**Administrative procedures and controls in inter-regional transport will be streamlined and simplified within the framework of TTFA” (ECO Vision 2025: Section III: Expected Outcomes: Outcomes (v).

### Background information:

1. The 7th Meeting of Customs Committee (August 17, 2021, virtually) of Transit Committee of Transit Transport Coordination Council (TTCC) welcomed the proposal of Iran Chamber of Commerce, Industries, Mines and Agriculture (ICCIMA) on the establishment of ECO Union of Multimodal Companies Association.

### Latest decisions:

1. The 12th ECO Ministerial Meeting on Transport (1-2 November, 2023, Tashkent) acknowledged the contribution and supportive role of the private sector in promotion of transit and trade in our region and supported the establishment of “ECO Freight Forwarders Association” and mandated the ECO Secretariat to prepare the relevant legal instruments of the Association.

### Expected outcomes for 2024 and the Secretariat’s recommendations:

1. The Member states (interested freight forwarders associations) may be requested to host first meeting of the “ECO Freight Forwarders Association”.

1. The Council may request the Secretariat and Islamic Republic of Iran to prepare and circulate the roadmap, statute and other basic documents of the ECO Freight Forwarders Association and circulate to the Member States.

### Area conclusions:

1. Private sector institutional involvement in development of transport tin the Region will be enhanced.

# MARITIME COOPERATION

## Priority Area No. 1

## Meeting of Heads of Maritime Organizations (HRMO)

### ECO Vision 2025 approach and target

1. **ECO Vision’s strategic objective** is “to maximize transport connectivity, mobility and access” (ECO Vision: Section I. Strategic Objectives).
2. Policy approach is “addressing unique challenges faced by the seven landlocked Member Countries of ECO” (ECO Vision: Policy Environment: paragraph-3, sentence3).
3. **ECO Vision’s expected outcome** is “regional transit transport infrastructure will be improved to interconnect the Member Countries within the region and neighboring regions to reach international markets” (ECO Vision 2025: Section III. Expected outcomes: Outcome (i)).
4. **The Midterm Vision Review (Nov 2021**) envisaged fund-raising “Forum” should be organized, by ECO-TDB in collaboration of ECO Secretariat, as early as feasible and possible, to mobilize funds through national and international financial institutions/banks, particularly for rehabilitation of existing railways and road links as well as construction of new railways. In the same spirit, the ECO-TDB may be mandated to facilitate transfer of resources/payments related to regional connectivity and ECO transit transport infrastructures.

### Background information

1. Till present, six meetings of Heads of Reference Marine Organizations were held. In May 2018, the 9th Meeting of Ministers of Transport of ECO Member States exchanged views on the development of maritime cooperation and considered new initiatives, in that regard. The Member States highlighted the importance of the vast area of cooperation on maritime in its facilitating trade/transport across the region. A specific focus was on “complementary networking” between ECO’s coastal countries’ seaports with the aim to help landlocked countries of ECO in their accessing open sea outlets. The unbeatable role of Free Economic Zones (FEZ), Free Trade Economic Zones (FTEZ) and Special Industrial Economic Zones at ports and terminals as well as similar facilities that could be beneficial to LLCs in transit of their goods and passengers was pointed out.

### Latest decisions:

1. The 33rd RPC welcomed the offer of the Republic of Türkiye to host the 7th HRMO in person mode and requested the latter to inform exact date and details of hospitality for the Meeting.
2. Taking into account the importance of digitalization of transport industry, the 33rd RPC supported the digitalization of maritime transport and requested the Member states to share their experiences in this connection.
3. The 33rd RPC took note of the following proposals of the Islamic Republic of Iran: Emphasis on trade exchange through maritime transportation and developing the operational cooperation through the ports among ECO coastal and landlocked countries; The need to promote the management of supply chains across transit corridors among ECO Member States and establishment of joint transportation companies/consortiums among forwarders; The need to cooperate jointly to develop multimodal logistic centers/hinterlands in order to increase the efficiency of sea-borne trade among ECO Member States.
4. The 33rd RPC appreciated the Secretariat in establishing ECO Consultative Maritime Officials Network using social media\digital platforms for facilitation of coordination on maritime issues in the ECO region.
5. The 33rd RPC requested the interested Member States to offer capacity building programs/training workshops on Global Maritime Distress and safety System (GMDSS) and International Convention for the Safety of Life at Sea (SOLAS) and the International Maritime Dangerous Goods (IMDG) Code to ensure a safe and sound transport chain.
6. The 12th Ministerial Meeting on Transport underscored importance of cooperation in maritime transport and consideration of reduction of port charges, offering preferential tariffs for LLDCs by Coastal Member States and organizing training courses on safety and handling issues.
7. The 12th Ministerial Meeting on Transport requested the Republic of Türkiye to organize the 7th Meeting of Heads of Maritime Organizations.
8. The 12th Ministerial Meeting on Transport thanked the Secretariat, the UNECE and Republic of Kazakhstan for jointly organizing the Workshop on safe packing of cargo and application of CTU code in the railway transport on 20-21 September 2023 in Aktau.

### Expected outcomes for 2024 and the Secretariat’s recommendations:

1. The Council may reiterate its request of Turkiye to host the 7th meeting of the HRMO in coordination with ECO Secretariat.
2. The Meeting may recommend organizing capacity building on various areas of maritime industry and in particular the safety and packing and handling of containers.
3. The Council may request the MS to collaborate on facilitating access of each other to the dry and sea ports and the neighboring countries.

## Priority Area No. 2

## “Establishment of a RO- RO Cooperation in the Caspian Sea

### ECO Vision 2025 approach and target

1. **ECO Vision’s strategic objective** is “to maximize transport connectivity, mobility and access” (ECO Vision: Section I. Strategic Objectives).
2. Policy approach is “addressing unique challenges faced by the seven landlocked Member Countries of ECO” (ECO Vision: Policy Environment: paragraph-3, sentence3).
3. **ECO Vision’s expected outcome** is “regional transit transport infrastructure will be improved to interconnect the Member Countries within the region and neighboring regions to reach international markets” (ECO Vision 2025: Section III. Expected outcomes: Outcome (i)).
4. **The Midterm Vision Review (Nov 2021**) envisaged fund-raising “Forum” should be organized, by ECO-TDB in collaboration of ECO Secretariat, as early as feasible and possible, to mobilize funds through national and international financial institutions/banks, particularly for rehabilitation of existing railways and road links as well as construction of new railways. In the same spirit, the ECO-TDB may be mandated to facilitate transfer of resources/payments related to regional connectivity and ECO transit transport infrastructures.

### Background information

1. The 31st Regional Planning Council noted with appreciation the efforts of the Islamic Republic of Iran for establishing Ro-Ro Ship in Caspian Sea and encouraged the Member States to consider utilizing the service in order to enhance connectivity and intra-regional trade within the region.
2. The 6th HRMO Meeting (27 April 2021) welcomed the proposal of the Islamic Republic of Iran to establish a committee for enhanced cooperation on promotion of Ro-Ro services in the Caspian Sea by the pre- coastal states. The Member States were requested to send their view points and proposals to the Secretariat in this connection.

### Latest decisions:

1. The 33rd RPC welcomed the proposal of establishment a committee for enhanced cooperation on promotion of Ro-Ro services in the Caspian Sea by the coastal states and requested the Member States to participate in this arrangement.
2. The 33rd RPC requested the Member States to consider organizing business meeting\forum of transport\ shipping operators of Caspian Sea.
3. The 12th ECO Ministerial Meeting on Transport (1-2 November, 2023, Tashkent) supported promotion of maritime cooperation particularly in establishing Ro-Ro Lines in the Caspian Sea and organizing technical training courses on maritime issues and further involvement of ECO Maritime Network in the activities of the Organization.

### Progress and recent developments since the 33rd RPC:

1. Republic of Azerbaijan, Iran and Turkmenistan have expressed interest to join to the RO- Ro cooperation committee.

### Secretariat’s suggestions and required actions:

1. The Council may welcome the proposal of establishment a committee for enhanced cooperation on promotion of Ro-Ro services in the Caspian Sea by the pre- coastal states. The Member States may be requested to participate in this arrangement.

### Area conclusions:

1. It is expected that multimodal cooperation among the Caspian States to be enhanced to further contribute to the regional connectivity.

## Priority Area No. 3

## “Establishment of a common gateway among ECO countries – ECO Gate”

### ECO Vision 2025 approach and target

1. **ECO Vision’s strategic objective** is “to maximize transport connectivity, mobility and access” (ECO Vision: Section I. Strategic Objectives).
2. Policy approach is “addressing unique challenges faced by the seven landlocked Member Countries of ECO” (ECO Vision: Policy Environment: paragraph-3, sentence3).
3. **ECO Vision’s expected outcome** is “regional transit transport infrastructure will be improved to interconnect the Member Countries within the region and neighboring regions to reach international markets” (ECO Vision 2025: Section III. Expected outcomes: Outcome (i)).
4. **The Midterm Vision Review (Nov 2021**) envisaged fund-raising “Forum” should be organized, by ECO-TDB in collaboration of ECO Secretariat, as early as feasible and possible, to mobilize funds through national and international financial institutions/banks, particularly for rehabilitation of existing railways and road links as well as construction of new railways. In the same spirit, the ECO-TDB may be mandated to facilitate transfer of resources/payments related to regional connectivity and ECO transit transport infrastructures.

### Background information

1. Till present, six meetings of Heads of Reference Marine Organizations were held. In May 2018, the 9th Meeting of Ministers of Transport of ECO Member States exchanged views on the development of maritime cooperation and considered new initiatives, in that regard. The Member States highlighted the importance of the vast area of cooperation on maritime in its facilitating trade/transport across the region. A specific focus was on “complementary networking” between ECO’s coastal countries’ seaports with the aim to help landlocked countries of ECO in their accessing open sea outlets. The unbeatable role of Free Economic Zones (FEZ), Free Trade Economic Zones (FTEZ) and Special Industrial Economic Zones at ports and terminals as well as similar facilities that could be beneficial to LLCs in transit of their goods and passengers was pointed out.
2. The 9th ECO Ministerial Meeting on Transport (1-3 May 2018, Turkmenbashi) adopted its concluding document, Turkmenbashi Declaration, in which recommendations 9 and 10 have strongly emphasized “the importance of linking the existing regional sea ports in the ECO Region with ECO landlocked and transit countries’ dry ports, to improve port facilities and services for massive transit of goods, modernize existing terminals in the ECO region. In that context, Ministers mandated the Transit Transport Coordinating Council (TTCC) “to explore ways and means for this purpose within ECO Frameworks”.
3. Following recommendations 9 and 10 of the Turkmenbashi Declaration, the Secretariat prepared the project proposal, of which its components’ contents stemmed from the decisions adopted by preceding 1 - 4 Meetings of Heads of Reference Maritime Organizations of ECO Member States while the strategizing of the project’s goals was fulfilled in direct accordance with recommendations 9 and 10 of the aforementioned Turkmenbashi Declaration.

1. The 5th Meeting of Heads of Reference Maritime Organizations of ECO Member States (MHRMO) included the participation of heads of large transport logistics companies of ECO’s landlocked countries (6 March 2019, ECO Secretariat). With the objective to implement recommendations 9-10 of the Turkmenbashi Declaration, the Meeting considered the aforementioned project proposal and the latter was endorsed and the project document was then circulated to Member States vide the Secretariat’s Note No. 332 dated 24.04.2019.

1. Further, the Secretariat arranged follow-up discussions in June 2019 at Secretariat on the implementation aspects/budget of the project proposal whence it was decided to supplement the proposal in view of the need for improvement of access of member countries to “free trade and economic areas/spaces” via “ECO gateways”. The project concept has been reviewed, in detail, against practicality of implementation was re-circulated to the Member States vide Note Verbale No. 839 dated 6 October 2019.
2. As per ECO procedure, the above project proposal has been considered at the level of Council of Ministers (COM) thereby brining it the information of the 24th COM (8-9 November 2019, Ankara) under the title: “Establishment of a common gateway among ECO countries – ECO Gate”.

### Latest decisions:

1. The 33rd RPC appreciated the efforts of the Secretariat and Islamic Development Bank to implement the ECO Gate project and requested the Member States to designate national consultant to cooperate with the international consultant for implementation of the ECO Gate project.
2. The 33rd RPC Requested the Secretariat to recruit a project officer to follow up implementation of the project as early as possible and provide necessary office facilities for this purpose.

### Progress and recent developments since the 33rd RPC:

1. The International Consultant is recruited by the IsDb in coordination with Secretariat.
2. The first “Inception Meeting” of the ECO Gate Project was held virtually on 23rd October, 2023.

### Secretariat’s suggestions and required actions:

1. The Meeting may request the Member States for designating national consultant to cooperate with the international consultant to implement the ECO Gate project.
2. The Secretariat may request the MS to actively participate in the relevant Meetings of the Project to be coordinated by the Secretariat.

### Area conclusions:

1. Connectivity among logistic hubs, smooth and unhindered flow of transit in a more secure and economical way will be improved in the Region.

# CIVIL AVIATION

## Priority Area No.1

## ECO Working Group on Civil Aviation:

### ECO Vision 2025 approach and target

1. The **TTFA objective** is “encouragement and promotion of combined and multimodal transport” (TTFA: Article 7: para-1)
2. Policy **approach** is “to ensure regional development, prosperity and well-being” (ECO Vision 2025: Policy Environment: para-1, sentence1).
3. **ECO Vision’s expected outcome** is “transport-related facilitative harmonized regulatory frameworks will be developed” (ECO Vision 2025: Section 3. Expected outcomes: Outcome (iii).
4. **The Midterm Vision Review (Nov 2021)** envisaged fund-raising “Forum” should be organized, by ECO-TDB in collaboration of ECO Secretariat, as early as feasible and possible, to mobilize funds through national and international financial institutions/banks, particularly for rehabilitation of existing railways and road links as well as construction of new railways. In the same spirit, the ECO-TDB may be mandated to facilitate transfer of resources/payments related to regional connectivity and ECO transit transport infrastructures.

### Background information

1. Civil Aviation has been discussed during the 9th ECO Ministerial Meeting on Transport (1-3 May 2018, Turkmenbashi) where it was decided that potential benefits from civil aviation for people in areas with complex access to transport be unlocked.
2. The 9th ECO Ministerial on Transport adopted the decision to establishing ECO Working Group on Civil Aviation to discuss the relevant issues.
3. The Working Group on Civil aviation is primarily mandated to enhance cooperation of the Member States particularly through: establishing cooperation in the field of training and advanced training of the inspectors of the aviation authorities as well as specialists in the civil aviation industry, certification of operators of aircraft and airfields (heliports) of civil aviation, licensing of aviation personnel and organization of air transportation, establishment of ECO Air Hub in the eastern ECO Region, cooperation among private Airliners, exchange of experience and experts, establishment of flights among tourism destinations in the region, Establishment of “Regional Framework Agreement on Civil aviation and establishing and enhancing relations with the relevant international organizations;
4. So far two meetings of the Working Group on Civil Aviation has taken place on 23rd November 2020 and 10th May 2022 (both virtually).

### Latest decisions:

1. The 33rd RPC appreciated the Islamic Republic of Iran and the Secretariat for organizing the Second Meeting of the ECO High Level Working Group (HLWG) on Civil Aviation (virtually on May 10, 2022) and while endorsing the report of the Meeting, requested the Member States to implement the decisions of the Meeting.
2. The 33rd RPC also requested the Member States to volunteer for organizing the 3rd Meeting of the HLWG on Civil aviation in 2023 and inform the details of hospitality through the Secretariat.

### Progress and recent developments since the 33rd RPC

1. The 11th Ministerial Meeting on Transport commended expansion of civil aviation cooperation, particularly, by establishing an air hub in Central Asia, lifting different barriers, establishing chartered flights and offering training courses and task the Secretariat to establish a network of accredited airlines and travel agencies of ECO;
2. The meeting had decided that the Member States will encourage their Public and Private Civil Airlines to consider establishing direct flights among tourist destinations within the region with a priority to charter flights and will send their proposals regarding the way and means to establish air connections among touristic destinations of the ECO region through diplomatic channels to the Secretariat.
3. The interested Member States were also requested with the Secretariat’s several NVs to provide the Secretariat with their proposals, requirements and needs with regards to capacity building programs/training workshops on civil aviation in 2022.

### Secretariat’s suggestions for 2024 and required actions

1. The Council may request Member States to provide their detailed proposals on cooperation in Civil Aviation to the Secretariat.
2. The Council may request Member States to provide the Secretariat with their proposals and requirements with regards to capacity building programms on civil aviation in 2023.
3. The Council may request the ECO Secretariat to do necessary coordination for holding the 3rd meeting of the ECO Working Group on Civil Aviation (WGCA) in 2023.
4. The Council may request the ECO Secretariat to do necessary coordination for holding a High Level Meeting of private airlines of the ECO Region in 2023.

### Area Conclusions on the area

1. It is expected that more cooperation on Civil Aviation within the region to happen and aviation services to expand

## Priority Area No.2

## Development of ECO Air Hubs

### ECO Vision 2025 approach and target

1. The **TTFA objective** is “encouragement and promotion of combined and multimodal transport” (TTFA: Article 7: para-1)
2. Policy **approach** is “to ensure regional development, prosperity and well-being” (ECO Vision 2025: Policy Environment: para-1, sentence1).
3. **ECO Vision’s expected outcome** is “transport-related facilitative harmonized regulatory frameworks will be developed” (ECO Vision 2025: Section 3. Expected outcomes: Outcome (iii).
4. **The Midterm Vision Review (Nov 2021)** envisaged fund-raising “Forum” should be organized, by ECO-TDB in collaboration of ECO Secretariat, as early as feasible and possible, to mobilize funds through national and international financial institutions/banks, particularly for rehabilitation of existing railways and road links as well as construction of new railways. In the same spirit, the ECO-TDB may be mandated to facilitate transfer of resources/payments related to regional connectivity and ECO transit transport infrastructures.

### Background information

1. During the 9th Ministerial Meeting on Transport on 1-3 May 2018 in Turkmenbashi (Turkmenistan), at the proposal of Turkmenistan the ECO Transport Ministers agreed on considering establishment of an “Air Transport Hub” preferably in the eastern ECO region (especially in Central Asia).
2. The 11th Ministerial Meeting on Transport commended expansion of civil aviation cooperation, particularly, by establishing an air hub in Central Asia, lifting different barriers, establishing chartered flights and offering training courses and task the Secretariat to establish a network of accredited airlines and travel agencies of ECO;

### Latest decisions:

1. The Council appreciated the Secretariat for preparing the “Concept Note on Establishment of ECO Air Hub in the Eastern ECO Region” especially in Central Asia and requested the Member States to provide their views/comments on the “Concept Note by June 2023
2. The 12th ECO Ministerial Meeting on Transport (1-2 November, 2023, Tashkent) welcomed the interest of the Republic of Azerbaijan and the Republic of Uzbekistan to designate Gabala Airport and Samarkand Airport as ECO Air Hub to contribute and enhance air connectivity of ECO region.
3. The 12th ECO Ministerial Meeting on Transport (1-2 November, 2023, Tashkent) encouraged the Member States to consider establishing regular and chartered flights to facilitate air connectivity, travel and tourism.

### Progress and recent developments since the 33rd RPC

1. The Gabala Airport of Republic of Azerbaijan and Samarkand Airport of the Republic of Uzbekistan are designated as ECO Air Hubs.

### Secretariat’s suggestions for 2024 and required actions

1. The council May appreciate the efforts of the Secretariat in preparation of the “Concept Paper of ECO Air Hub” and materialization of the initiative that will serve a major breakthrough in air connectivity of the region.
2. The Council may request the Republic of Azerbaijan and Republic of Uzbekistan to provide in collaboration with the Secretariat the Member States with the strategy, road map and marketing plans for enhancement of the said airports to serve as regional air hubs.
3. The Meeting may request the said MS to consider preferential treatments for the officials of the Member States through installing special entry gates at the said Air Hubs.
4. The Council may recommend the above countries to host the 3rd Working Group on Civil Aviation as well as the High Level Meeting of Private Airlines of the ECO Region in the designated ECO Air Hubs.

### Area Conclusions on the area

1. Civil Aviation cooperation and air connectivity of the LLDCs will be enhanced and will contribute to trade, investment and tourism development in the region.

# “Establishing of ECO Transport Excellence Award”

### ECO Vision 2025 approach and target

1. The **TTFA objective** is “encouragement and promotion of combined and multimodal transport” (TTFA: Article 7: para-1)
2. Policy **approach** is “to ensure regional development, prosperity and well-being” (ECO Vision 2025: Policy Environment: para-1, sentence1).
3. **ECO Vision’s expected outcome** is “transport-related facilitative harmonized regulatory frameworks will be developed” (ECO Vision 2025: Section 3. Expected outcomes: Outcome (iii).

### Background information

1. The 11th Ministerial Meeting on transport (2nd Feb. 2022) acknowledge the contribution and constructive role of the private sector in promotion of transit and trade in our region and decided to establish “ECO Transport Excellence Award” in recognition and appreciation of the best performing transport companies, associations and other stakeholders in road, railways, maritime and civil aviation and mandate the ECO Secretariat to prepare the relevant modalities in this regard.
2. The purpose of the award is to recognize the role of ECO region private transport companies in development and advancement of land, air, and sea transport and connectivity in an outstanding fashion including services rendered quality of performance for each company, accountability, transparency and ease of service provision. The Award will contribute to further development of transport industry through promotion of outstanding performance of the Award winners in the region and beyond.

### Latest decisions:

1. The 11th ECO Ministerial Meeting on Transport decided to establish “ECO Transport Excellence Award” in recognition and appreciation of the best performing transport companies, associations and other stakeholders in road, railways, maritime and civil aviation and mandate the ECO Secretariat to prepare the relevant modalities in this regard.
2. The 12th Ministerial Meeting on transport appreciated the Secretariat for preparation of the modalities of the “ECO Transport Excellence Award” and requested the Secretariat to organize the Award Ceremony in collaboration with ECO-CCI and the relevant ECO stakeholders and interested Member States in 2024.

### Secretariat’s suggestions for 2024 and required actions

1. The Council may propose to the ECO – CCI, other potential candidates and the Member States to consider organizing Award Ceremony on the sidelines of the transport ministerial meetings holding the Meeting for discussion the future steps of organizing of the “ECO Transport Excellence Award”.

### Area Conclusions on the area

1. The role of private sector stakeholders in development of transport will further be highlighted and the ECO will be more promoted.

## COMMUNICATIONS

## Priority Area No. 1:

## “Development of Information Society in the region” (Strategic Objective I, ECO Vision 2025)

### ECO Vision 2025 approach and target

1. **ECO Vision’s target** is “to achieve goals of information society in ECO region” (ECO Vision 2025: Section I: Strategic Objectives, Objective I.)
2. **Policy approach** is in line with the “Regional ICT Strategy for Information Society Development and ECO Regional Strategy for Broad-band Development will be developed” (ECO Vision 2025: Policy Environment: para-4).
3. **ECO Vision’s expected outcome** is “access and increased use of ICT” “digital divide will be bridged” “increased **availability** of digital local content will be encouraged” ICT infrastructure will be improved” “institutional ICT framework and skills development will be improved” (ECO Vision 2025: Section 3. Expected outcomes: Outcomes (viii- xii).
4. **The Midterm Vision Review (Nov 2021)** envisaged fund-raising “Forum” should be organized, by ECO-TDB in collaboration of ECO Secretariat, as early as feasible and possible, to mobilize funds through national and international financial institutions/banks, particularly for rehabilitation of existing railways and road links as well as construction of new railways. In the same spirit, the ECO-TDB may be mandated to facilitate transfer of resources/payments related to regional connectivity and ECO transit transport infrastructures.

### Background

1. To define the needs for the development of infrastructure connectivity and services in the ECO Member States, the 1st Meeting of ECO Ministers of ICT (November 2012, Tehran) decided that a feasibility study will be conducted to identify the aforementioned needs. The Secretariat was asked to approach CPR for allocating US$ 30,000 from the ECO Feasibility Study Fund to prepare such study.
2. The International Telecommunication Union (ITU) was also approached for the support to ECO in implementing the aforementioned step and sharing institutional expertise. Thus, ITU and ECO successfully implemented two phases of the regional study.
3. The first phase resulted in designing of the Feasibility Study to identify ICT needs of ECO Member States. The design was prepared by the lead expert, recruited by ITU, in collaboration with the Focal Points from concerned authorities of Member States. The key findings of the Study have been presented to the wrap-up meeting on ICT (May 2016, Tehran). That meeting developed recommendations on: the development of the ECO regional Strategy for Information Society, broad band development to increase public access to fast internet through establishing key priorities, targets and projects. It also recommended implementing the Strategy and establishing an efficient institutional set of regulations for the development of the effective legal and regulatory framework.
4. The second phase resulted in the preparation of the regional Study on “Information Society Services in the ECO Region: current status and ways forward” to assess the level of the adoption of ICT in such areas as Health, Education and Agriculture.
5. The 2nd Ministerial Meeting on ICT considered ways and means of enhancement of regional cooperation in the ICT area; preparation of the “2025 ECO Regional Strategy for Information Society Development”; “Action Plan” as ECO’s roadmap on ICT and called for the establishment of an appropriate mechanism, a Working Group, to enable Member States to regularly meet and adopt decisions on the issues in the framework of the proposed Regional Strategy and Action Plan.

### Latest decisions on Communication Cooperation

1. The 33rd RPC appreciated the Islamic Republic of Iran and the Secretariat for organizing the Second Meeting of the ECO Working Group on Information and Communications Technology (ICT) and requested the Member States to implement the decisions of the Meeting.
2. The 33rd RPC welcomed the offer of Türkiye to host the 3rd Meeting of ECO- ICT Working Group to discuss cooperation on Cyber Security in the ECO region by June 2023 and the Council also requested the Secretariat to finalize the exact dates and other details in consultation with the host authorities.
3. The 33rd RPC requested the Member States to share their national strategies of ICT development through the ECO Secretariat and exchange experiences and best practices in the sector.
4. The 33rd RPC welcomed the finalization of the “Terms of Reference (ToR) for the ECO High Level Working Group ICT Regulatory Authorities”, and requested the Secretariat to follow up organizing the relevant meetings and further enhancing cooperation in the regulatory areas.

### Progress and recent developments since the 33rd RPC

1. The 3rd ECO Ministerial Meeting on Information and Communication Technology (ICT) preceded by the Senior Official Meeting was hosted by the Ministry of Information and Communications Technology of the Islamic Republic of Iran in collaboration with the ECO Secretariat on 12-13 July 2023 in Tehran.
2. The Ministerial Meeting focused on a lot of challenges to implement the ECO Regional Strategy on Information Society Development and priority areas of cooperation including but not limited among others Action Plan 2023-2025 (2025 ECO Regional Strategy for information Society Development), Provision of high-speed broadband for different sectors, Infrastructure and ICT applications Plan 2025-2030”, Space Technology, Artificial intelligence, Data transit, Regional Networking and others. The unanimously adopted Tehran Declaration and mandated the ECO to tackle these issues in various ways, and the Webinar was one of that helping to promote ICT developments in ECO countries. It would be especially notable to see practical implementation of the big data algorithms in Railways Measurements, smart squeezing of data for data center centers and fiber optics serving Customs and Railways infrastructure and beyond.
3. The 1st ECO Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) Webinar on Advanced Big Data Processing Algorithms for Data Centers and Fiber Optic Lines, was held virtually in Tehran on 26th September, 2023 (ECO-Big Data), supported by the Ministry of Digital Development, Innovations and Aerospace Industry of the Republic of Kazakhstan and ECO Science Foundation (SF).

During the Meeting participants were informed about Algorithms based on a breakthrough in solving Riemann Hypothesis as fundamental mathematical approaches that could be applied in real sectors of industry, i.e. Information compression and information transfer; Railway measurements; Seismic exploration; Optimal control of oil and gas production; Optimal control of oil and gas transfer; Control of heat and mass transfer in thermonuclear processes, Novel in Mechanical Engineering, Blade (Design) Control for Ships, Establishing and maintaining optimal Big Data opportunities across all domains of human activity and Earthquake predictions.

1. The Republic of Kazakhstan initiated project concept Digital Modeling for Advanced Railroad Construction and Maintenance of ECO railways. Project proposal will be submitted to Member States for consideration.

### Secretariat’s suggestions for 2024 and required actions

1. The may appreciate Iran for hosting the 3rd ministerial Meeting on ICT and request the Member States to implement the decision of the Meeting. The Council may also request the Member States to consider organizing the 4th ECO Ministerial Meeting on Information and Communication Technology (ICT) preceded by the Senior Official Meeting.
2. The Council may request the MS to organize the meeting of the “ECO High Level Working Group ICT Regulatory Authorities”, and requested the Secretariat to follow up active participation of the MS in the Meeting that will further enhane cooperation in the regulatory areas.
3. Council may welcome the offer of Türkiye to host the 3rd Meeting of ECO- ICT Working Group to discuss cooperation on cyber security in ECO region in 2024 and the Council may request the Secretariat to finalize the exact dates and other details in consultation with the host authorities.
4. The Council may request ECO Secretariat to enhance and continue the cooperation with ITU to seek institutional guidance and any new possible project to be implemented in 2024.
5. The Council may request ECO Secretariat to implement, in consultation with ITU, a study project on “The ways and means to establish and develop ECO regional fiber optic network” and in this regard the Council may call the Secretariat for recruitment of a specialist for implementation of the said Study Project in first half of 2023.
6. The Council may request the Member States to consider organizing technical and scientific capacity building and training courses of Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) and Artificial Intelligence.
7. The Meeting may request the Secretariat to arrange technical meeting on cooperation, among others, on space technology, artificial intelligence, data transit, CERTs cooperation, emerging technologies, establishment of cybersecurity and e-Government committees and Startups.

### Area Conclusions

1. The Secretariat in coordination with Member States will establish an appropriate mechanism to enable regular interaction to find practical solutions in handling the issues related to the implementation of the Regional Strategy and Action Plan on ICT. Cooperation with ITU may be continued to provide institutional guidance and share expertise with Member States.
2. Cooperation among MS will be enhance on new areas such as space technology, artificial intelligence, data transit, CERTs cooperation, emerging technologies, establishment of cybersecurity and e-Government committees and Startups.

# COOPERATION WITH REGIONAL/INTERNATIONAL ORGANIZATIONS (Progress since 33rd RPC)

1. In line with the general policies of the Organization, the ECO Secretariat has established working relation with various international organizations and has enjoyed their support, to various degrees, in development of Transport and Communication in the Region including UNECE, UNESCAP, UNCTAD, IsDB, Regional Program of ADB for Central Asia (CAREC), International Union of Railways (UIC), Intergovernmental Organization of Railways (OSJD), Inter-Governmental Organization for International Carriage by Rail (OTIF), International Road Transport Union (IRU), International Telecommunications Union (ITU), International Maritime Organization (IMO) and others.
2. IsDB is a long-term important partner of ECO in materializing connectivity projects. ECO/IDB Joint Project on implementation of TTFA, IDB’s support through the Technical Cooperation Agreement (TCA) for a corridor developing study for KTI are the true witness of mutually beneficial cooperation at inter-institutional level. IDB has also contributed to the GIS project and the joint project of promoting eTIR and eCMR in ECO Region. The Bank has also agreed to contribute US $ 65000 to the ECO Gate project. The Secretariat and IDB are in continuous consultations on financing different projects of regional importance.
3. IRU‘s technical assistance to ECO Member Countries, notably, for the countries en-route ITI Road Corridor has enabled the launch of actual TIR operations with loaded trucks along ITI. Such assistance may help proceed to implement e-TIR. Due to necessity for increased cooperation, it is highly recommended to further deepen the mutual ties and institutionalize the relations with IRU. The ECO Secretariat in cooperation with International Road Transport Union established ECO-TIR National Associations Consultative Group (ECO-TIRACG). The First Meeting of the ECO-TIRACG was held virtually on October 2, 2023, with participation of all TIR Associations of ECO Member States.
4. ECO’s cooperation with UNESCAP on utilizing its multi-faceted institutional expertise has been felt in implementing the project on the commercialization of the railway between Kazakhstan-Turkmenistan-Iran (KTI). In addition to preparing the study, ECO also proposed other areas for joint cooperation such as tracking systems, electronic seals, digitalization of transport, emerging intelligent transport and zero-carbon transport vehicles.
5. UNECE’s Working Party on Customs Questions affecting Transport (WP.30) presents an appropriate platform to showcase ECO’s activities addressing customs provisions of TTFA. Since “road safety” issue is on ECO’s agenda since long, UNECE may guide ECO how to benefit from UNECE’s expertise in this area.
6. Along the similar lines, ECO and UNECE are cooperating on establishment of the GIS transport observatory under the ECO|UNECE\IsDB joint project (Enhancing Regional Connectivity through GIS).
7. In the same respect, ECO and UNECE are cooperating on e-CMR. Currently, some of the ten ECO Member States three are contracting parties to e-CMR whilst all ten to CMR Convention. The goal of the capacity building workshops is the promotion of accession to e-CMR Protocol. The project is financed by IsDB.
8. ECO jointly with UNECE established “Coordination Committee on Trans Caspian and Almaty-Tehran-Istanbul Corridors” (that would gather periodically in the format of a Group of Friends of the WP.5 Chair in collaboration with the ECO Secretariat) to exchange views and information on, inter alia, the technical inter-operability issues, establishment of a unified time schedule and tariffs for both corridors; development of a marketing plan, which could serve as a basis to attract higher interest levels from private sector operators and freight forwarders as well as to boost digitalization efforts of transport and customs documents. Since establishment of the Coordination Committee 3 Meetings were organized.
9. ECO and United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE) jointly organized a “Workshop on the Safety of Transporting and Handling Containers and Other Cargo Transport Units (CTUs)”, on 20-21 September 2023 in the Port of Aktau, Kazakhstan.
10. UIC and ECO have jointly developed Action Plan of cooperation on projects of common interest in the area of operational railways. Extensive expertise collected by UIC within its membership of 182 countries and territories on operational railways and technical standards/norms is highly valued by ECO.

1. OTIF has been instrumental in providing legal advisory on matters relating to transport. In November 2022 ECO is granted the status of standing observer in OTIF's ad-hoc Committee on Legal Affairs and International Cooperation.
2. As connectivity of the LLDCs (Land Locked Developing Countries) is one of the major concerns of the Organization, the Secretariat has been in close cooperation with the UNOHRLLS for preparatory works for planning the next Plan of Action for LLDCs and has actively participated in the relevant ministerial conferences and review meetings of the Vienna Plan of Action (VPoA) and also is planning to participate in next Ministerial meeting of the LLDCs in Rwanda in 2024. The Secretariat is also in consultation with UNOHRLLS to conclude
3. It is in ECO’s plans to elevate the scope of cooperation with OSJD and other specialized organizations in transport to project-oriented collaborative level thereby strengthening the impact through tangible project deliverables.

1. On the ICT Regional Strategy Development, ECO will continue collaborating with International Telecommunication Union (ITU) during the implementation phases of “2025 ECO Regional Strategy for information Society Development” and Action Plan designed for the implementation of key objectives set by the Strategy.
2. Cooperation with UNOHRLLS, IMO and ICAO is also in the prospect particularly with the recent mandates of the Secretariat by particularly the Civil Aviation and Maritime Meetings.
3. The 12th ECO Ministerial Meeting on Transport (1-2 November, 2023, Tashkent) acknowledged the pro-active approach of the Secretariat in implementing decisions of the Ministerial Meeting and in particular in establishing and enhancing relations with various international organization including UNOHRLLS, OTIF, UNECE, UNESCAP, IRU and other relevant agencies and encouraged organization of joint projects, programs, training courses and workshops between ECO Secretariat and IsDB, UNESCAP, UNECE, IRU, IMO, OTIF, OSJD, ICAO, UNOHRLLS, UNCTAD, TRACECA and other international organizations and, in this framework, call upon the Secretariat to further strengthen its relations with the interested international organizations.

# Secretariat’s suggestions and required actions

1. The Council may appreciate efforts of the Secretariat in strengthening cooperation with Regional/International Organizations, including IsDB, UNECE, UNESCAP, IRU, UIC, OSJD, ITU, AIIB, OTIF, CAREC/ADB and others, to seek expertise and financial/technical assistance for advancing ECO’s mandated projects and, in that regard, the Council may further encourage the Secretariat to keep continue such efforts.
2. In view of ongoing cooperation and the prospective cooperation, the Council may request the Secretariat to institutionalize cooperation with the interested international organizations\agencies\unions in order to enhance transit transport and communication cooperation in the region.

### Annex II: Proposed Calendar of Events/Meetings 2024

* **ECO Events\Meetings**

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **No.** | **Event/Activity** | **Host** | **Date** |
|  | 9th Meeting of the Railway Committee of the TTCC | Iran  (In-person) | 2024 |
|  | 15th Meeting of the ECO Heads of Railway Authorities | Iran  (In-person) | 2024 |
|  | 11th Meeting of Road Committee of TTCC | Tbd  (In-person) | 2024 |
|  | 7th Insurance Committee Meeting of TTCC | Tbd  (In-person) | 2024 |
|  | Meeting of Consular Officials of the ECO on Visa Simplification for Drivers and Persons involved in Transport | Tbd  (In Person) | 2024 |
|  | Meeting on the Draft Modalities of the Article 7 of the TTFA | Virtual | 2024 |
|  | 14th Meeting HLWG on Islamabad-Tehran-Istanbul Train | Pakistan  (In-person) | 2024 |
|  | 3rd HLWG meetings on Istanbul-Almaty and Bandar Abbas-Almaty Container Trains | Tbd  (In-person) | 2024 |
|  | 6th HLWG Meeting on Qazvin-Rasht-Astara (Iran)-Astara (Azerbaijan) Railway | Azerbaijan  (In-person) | 2024 |
|  | 7th HLWG Meetings on Islamabad-Tehran-Istanbul Road Corridor | Pakistan  (In-Person) | 2024 |
|  | Technical Working Group Meeting on ITI BCPs | Iran | 2024 |
|  | The First Meeting of the High-Level Working Group on the “Kyrgyz Republic -Uzbekistan-Turkmenistan-Iran-Türkiye” (KUTIT) Corridor | Kyrgyz Republic  (In person) | 2024 |
|  | 2nd Meeting of the High-Level Working Group on TUTIT Multimodal Corridor | Tbd  In person | 2024 |
|  | 7th Meeting of the ECO Heads of Reference Maritime Organizations | Türkiye  (In-person) | 2024 |
|  | 3rd Working Group Meeting on Civil Aviation Authorities | Tbd  (In-person) | 2024 |
|  | High Level Meeting of Private Airlines of the ECO Region in Uzbekistan | Tbd  In person | 2024 |
|  | ECO\UNECE Coordination Committee on Almaty- Istanbul and Trans Caspian Corridors | Tbd  In person | 2024 |
|  | 3rd Meeting of ECO-ICT Working Group on Cyber Security | Tbd  Turkiye | 2024 |
|  | 1st Meeting of the ECO High Level Working Group ICT Regulatory Authorities | Tbd | 2024 |
|  | 2nd Meeting of the “Sub-Working Group for Commercialization of the KTI Corridor” | Tbd  In person | 2024 |
|  | Webinar on Advanced Big Data Processing Algorithms for Data Centers and Fiber Optic Lines | Tbd  In person | 2024 |

* **Non-ECO Events\Meetings** (subject to availability of financial resources)

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **No.** | **Event/Activity** | **Venue** | **Date** |
|  | UNECE Working Party on Customs (WP 30) | Geneva  (In-person) | 2024 |
|  | ECE/ITC - Working Party on Road Transport - | Geneva  (In-person) | 2024 |
|  | UNESCAP – 8th session of the Committee on Transport, | Bangkok  (In-person) | 2024 |
|  | WP. 5 Meeting (Working Party on Transport trends and Economics) | Geneva  (In-person) | 2024 |
|  | Ministerial Meeting Vienna Plan of Action for LLDCs | Rwanda/Kigali | 2024 |

**List of abbreviations, acronyms used in draft WPs on Transport and Communications**

ECO – Economic Cooperation Organization

ICT – Information Communications Technology

TC-Directorate for Transport and Communications

RPC – Regional Planning Council

CPR – Council of Permanent Representatives

COM – Council of Ministers of Foreign Affairs of ECO

TTCC – Transit Transport Coordination Council

TTFA – Transit Transport Framework Agreement

ECO-TIRACG- ECO TIR Associations Consultative Group

TC – Transport and Communications

ITI – Islamabad – Tehran – Istanbul railway route

TCDD – Taşimacilik A.S. TCDD – Turkish Railway Authority

RAI – Railway Authority of Iran

PR – Pakistan Railway

KTI-Kazakhstan-Turkmenistan-Iran Railway route

KTAI – Kyrgyzstan-Tajikistan-Afghanistan-Iran railway route

CMM – common corridor management mechanism

BCP -border crossing point

TEU – Twenty-foot equivalent unit

FEU – Forty-foot equivalent unit

IRU – International Road Union

UIC – World Railways Union, International Union of Railways

OSJD – Intergovernmental Organization of Railways

OTIF – Intergovernmental Organization for International Carriage by Rail

ESCAP – United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific

IsDB – Islamic Development Bank

ITU – International Telecommunications Union

LLDCs – Land Locked Developing Countries

Project stakeholders – the project participating ECO Member States

INSTC – International North South Transport Corridor