

**34th Meeting of the**

**ECO Regional Planning Council (RPC)**

**Working Paper on Energy, Minerals and Environment**

Prepared by the ECO Secretariat

18-21 December 2023

ECO Secretariat, Tehran

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# ENERGY

# *Overall status*

 ECO Region is well endowed with energy resources. It avails one third of the global hydrocarbon resources and significant potential of renewables. Energy is among the priority areas of cooperation within the ECO. “ECO Vision 2025” identified the enhancement of energy security and sustainability through wider energy access and trade as one of the ECO’s major strategic objectives.

In pursuance of “ECO Vision 2025” and “ECO Strategy for Energy Cooperation 2030”, mainstreaming transition to sustainable energy sources in ECO’s overall energy agenda has predominantly been materializing via promotion of two flagship energy projects: 1. The Project of establishment of the ECO Clean Energy Centre (CECECO); and 2. The Project of establishment of the ECO Regional Electricity Market (ECO-REM).

Both crucial energy projects have long been expected to pave the way of this transformation process. Each of them has evidently its track of progress. Over the past few years, the Project on establishment of CECECO has been progressing steadily, while the ECO Secretariat in partnership with the Republic of Azerbaijan as the host country of the Centre and current Chairman in ECO, as well as with the United Nations Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO) was engaged in promoting the operationalization of the Centre and involvement of development partners in the subject project.

 Notwithstanding the fact that the regional electricity trade and connectivity are conceived to generate maximum benefits to all ECO Member States, several attempts of the ECO Secretariat to speed up launching of the subject project over the past few years did not succeed the expected outcomes. ECO-REM could be instrumental in contributing to the long-term regional energy sustainability, but still needs to be promoted through strong resolve by the Member States, their coherent approach and complementarities.

 Meanwhile, a number of relevant formats and platforms exist within the ECO framework for unfolding huge partnership opportunities in hydrocarbons and enhancement of ECO cooperation in the fields of oil, gas and petrochemicals. The new ECO Energy Strategy and its Action Plan 2030 introduced useful solutions for Member States how to go beyond national agendas and best streamline cooperation on hydrocarbons within ECO. The Strategy particularly focused on new region-wide initiatives and projects in realization of “ECO Vision 2025”.

The Secretariat continues its proactive cooperation policy and dialogue with its international partners, namely the Energy Charter, UNIDO, UNESCAP and others with a view to identify possible strategic partnership frameworks, to get their financial/technical support to ECO projects and activities, as well as to expand ECO outreach and visibility.

## Priority area 1: Implementation of ECO Strategy for Energy Cooperation 2030 / Plan of Actions, Decisions of 4th ECO Energy Ministerial Meeting

# ECO Vision approach and target

Achieving strategic objective in energy, requires a supportive policy environment which shall include, among others, broad political consensus and involvement of all stakeholders from public and private sectors. Expected Outcome III, in Energy part of “ECO Vision 2025” stipulates that “Enhanced policy coherence for mainstreaming objectives of the SDGs and ‘UN Sustainable Energy for All’ will be encouraged”.

## Background information

 The new ECO Energy Strategy and its Action Plan had been elaborated by the Secretariat and developed through small size project by hiring consultants from Member States. The 4th ECO Energy Ministerial Meeting hosted by the Republic of Azerbaijan on 24th June 2021 approved the subject document.

Furthermore, the 4th ECO Ministerial Meeting on Energy provided a timely decision-making platform for streamlining energy agenda of ECO with the strong focus on sustainable energy and electricity. The Meeting stimulated high-level policy dialogue with a view to enhancing regional synergies, promoting ongoing/expected activities and projects in the energy field, as well as developing policy guidelines for realization of energy-related components of “ECO Vision 2025”.

## Recent developments, latest decisions and progress since the 33rd RPC

 The ECO Secretariat made several calls on the follow up towards implementation of the Energy Strategy and its Action Plan 2030, and the outcomes of 4th ECO Energy Ministerial Meeting since 33rd RPC.

 The 5th Ministerial Meeting on Energy, scheduled for May and then for July 2023 in Uzbekistan has been postponed twice.

## Expected outcome and focused issues/events for 2024.

The relevant sectoral ECO platforms are expected to extensively deliberate the details of the new ECO Strategy for Energy Cooperation/Plan of Actions 2030 for the next multi-year period.

The implementation of this new Strategy and Action Plan 2030 shall be the responsibility of the concerned authorities in the Member States. In order to facilitate its implementation, each Member State is expected to designate a national focal point to coordinate and oversee the implementation of its in-country components. The management and coordination of the document shall be pursued by the ECO Secretariat, in collaboration with national focal points and relevant institutions/authorities of the Member States,

Republic of Uzbekistan expressed readiness to host the 5th ECO Energy Ministerial Meeting on Energy. Meanwhile, the Member States are expected to take more active role in enriching, following up and initiating regional cooperation agenda in the energy profile of the Organization.

## Secretariat's recommendations

* The Council may recommend to all Member States to reflect the “ECO Strategy for Energy Cooperation 2030” and Action Plan in their relevant national development agenda for enhancement of regional energy cooperation, and solicit the Member States to submit issues in their interests and needs in regional energy landscape for further assessment of progress in ECO Energy Strategy.
* The Council may request Member States to review ECO Energy Action Plan 2030 and propose projects to the Secretariat for its implementation.
* The Council may welcome the Republic of Uzbekistan to host 5th Energy Ministerial Meeting and encourage Member States to convey ideas/ proposals/ recommendations for the stocktaking to contribute to the preparation of the subject meeting.

## Area conclusion

 ECO Strategy for Energy Cooperation and Its Action Plan 2030 has been elaborated and adopted as a result of joint efforts and decision of the Member States in compliance with their national priorities. The success of its implementation will be based on the will of Member States how to move forward to benefit from the Strategy and its Action Plan.

 High level energy dialogue among ECO Member States represented at ministerial level plays crucial role in defining future steps and steer full implementation of previous decisions. ECO Ministerial Meeting on Energy in 2024 should focus on future opportunities and existing gaps to draw tailor-made approach in regional energy architecture of the ECO.

## Priority area 2: Sustainable Energy Transition and Establishment of the ECO Clean Energy Centre

# ECO Vision approach and target

ECO Member Countries will be encouraged for deployment of environmental-friendly energy technologies in order to mitigate adverse environmental footprints of the energy transfer and trade.

More diverse and resilient energy architecture in the Region will be supported through transformation to renewable, as well as cleaner and sustainable energy sources. ECO Clean Energy Centre will be established.

To the widest extent possible, relevant energy efficiency goals and objectives will be achieved at the ECO regional level.

*(As outlined in Expected outcomes (iv), (v) and (vii) respectively of "Section C. Energy" of the “ECO Vision 2025”)*

## Background information

* The idea of establishment of the ECO Clean Energy Centre (CECECO) was pioneered by the ECO Secretariat as the outcome of the ECO-UNIDO cooperation. The key overall objective of this joint project is to create an enabling environment for renewable energy and energy efficiency markets and investments. This project represents one of the most promising recent endeavours within ECO. It is considered as a future element of the Global Network of Regional Sustainable Energy Centres (GN-SEC) being implemented across the globe and coordinated by UNIDO.
* In accordance with UNIDO’s project cycle, CECECO Project is sought to be implemented in three phases: preparatory, first operational and second operational phases. The 233rd Meeting of CPR on 11 September 2018 decided to launch the Preparatory Phase of the project. “Terms of Reference (ToR) for the provision of services to assess the added value, feasibility and financial sustainability of an ECO Clean Energy Centre” was jointly prepared and agreed upon in January 2019. The 25th Council of Ministers (27 November 2021, Ashgabat, Turkmenistan) selected the Republic of Azerbaijan to host the Centre and adopted its Charter. On 16 March 2022, the Partners’ Roundtable Conference on the Start-up and Operationalization of CECECO was held virtually.
* ECO Experts Group Meeting on Renewable Energy Sources (EGRES) represents a major experts-level platform to discuss development of regional cooperation agenda in renewable energy sources and energy efficiency.
* The Republic of Uzbekistan hosted the 4th Meeting of EGRES in a virtual format on April 27, 2022. At the 4th Meeting, the ECO Secretariat delivered the presentation on the project proposal: “Feasibility study on setting up and implementing energy efficiency targets in the ECO region”.
* Project would envisage the diagnostics of ECO Member States high impact sectors, relevant policies, supply chains, barriers to energy efficiency and potential solutions. Notably, the project results are planned to be delivered at high level diagnostic of energy efficiency opportunities in priority sectors.

## Recent developments, latest decisions and progress since the 33rd RPC

* Currently, ECO is completing the preparatory phase of CECECO Project. The estimated budget for preparatory phase of CECECO Project was initially 223000EUR, out of which 50000USD was allocated from the Feasibility and General Purpose Fund (FGPF) by the decision of the 233rd CPR Meeting.
* The Charter of CECECO is open for signing and ratification by the Member States. In 2023, the Republic of Azerbaijan (8 March 2023) and the Republic of Turkiye (during the 27th COM Meeting in Shusha (Azerbaijan) on 10 October 2023) signed the Charter. The 268th Council of Permanent Representatives (CPR) Meeting, held in October 2022 considered allocating 50000 USD from FGPF for financing the project on setting up and implementing energy efficiency targets in the ECO region.
* It was agreed to rename the title of the EGRES meeting as “Experts Group Meeting for Renewable Energy Sources and Energy Efficiency”.
* Turkmenistan expressed its readiness to host the 5th EGRES meeting on May 2023 (virtually), however this meeting was postponed due to the lack of quorum. The new dates of the event, preferably within the second quarter of 2024 is expected to be proposed by Turkmenistan.

## Expected outcome and focused issues/events for 2024.

* ECO Secretariat will continue its deep engagement with UNIDO, as well as with other ongoing and potential international donors/institutions in launching the process of first operational phase on establishment of ECO Clean Energy Centre (CECECO). Following tasks should be undertaken jointly by Member States and the Secretariat further:
1. Signing of the Charter of CECECO and ratification by interested Member States, as well as other regulatory procedures to enable launching of operational phase;
2. Fund-raising among interested stake-holders from ECO and other international partners;
3. To organize the next Steering Committee Meeting of the Global Network of Regional Sustainable Energy Centres (GN-SEC) in Baku, Azerbaijan.
* Once the Centre is inaugurated and operationalized, UNIDO may pledge certain amount for secondment of an international expert to support its activities. Following the inauguration, the Project will proceed to the operational phase, which envisages launching of regional strategic programmes.
* The convening of the 5th EGRES meeting may particularly contribute to unleashing the opportunities in enhancement of cooperation in sustainable energy transition in the region. In this respect, the launching of the project on energy efficiency can make a particular added value to this agenda and address expected outcome of Vision 2025.

## Secretariat's recommendations

* The Council may call upon the Member States to be actively involved in operationalization process of CECECO, most notably to speed up signing and ratification of the Charter of the Centre, as well as consideration of political, financial and technical support for successful and soonest launching of the Operational Phase of the project.
* The Council may invite to double efforts by key stake-holders, as the host country, ECO, UNIDO and international donors for fund-raising of CECECO Project, particularly for seed-funding.
* The Council may invite the Republic of Azerbaijan as a host of the Center to consider hosting the next Steering Committee Meeting of the Global Network of Regional Sustainable Energy Centres (GN-SEC) in 2024, which will greatly contribute global outreach of energy transition by ECO.
* The Council may encourage Member States to actively participate in the ECO Experts Group Meeting on Renewable Energy Sources (EGRES) to address their regional cooperation agenda for mainstreaming sustainable energy transition to the cleaner sources.
* The Council may call for active engagement of the Member States during realization of the project on setting up and implementing energy efficiency targets in the ECO region.

## Area conclusion

CECECO may be inaugurated once three Member States will sign and ratify the Charter of this Centre to procedurally enable its operationalization. ECO Member States will evidently avail the huge opportunities offered by financial mechanisms of the Centre to conduct valuable sustainable energy transition projects, which will benefit the whole ECO Region. Organizing GN-SEC steering committee meeting in Azerbaijan with participation of other ECO Members States will foster global visibility of ECO energy transition profile, as well as contribute to exploring new initiatives of regional cooperation.

## Priority area 3: Establishment of the ECO Regional Electricity Market (ECO-REM)

## ECO Vision approach and target

Efforts will be made for harmonization and alignment towards regional power/electricity market within the ECO Region for harnessing benefits of larger integrated systems.

*(As outlined in Expected outcome (i) of "Section C. Energy" of the “ECO Vision 2025”)*

## Background information

As ECO’s major and long-standing energy project, the establishment of the ECO Regional Electricity Market (ECO-REM) aims at harmonizing and merging the electricity markets in the region. It should be realized through building up synergies and complementarities among the existing/expected fragmented bilateral and multilateral electricity grids in the ECO Region and mobilize, integrate them under the ECO-REM platform.

The budget of the subject project is estimated at 300000-400000USD. Key funding sources are expected to be seed financing by the interested Member States, FGPF, as well as financial institutions and donors.

The initiative of establishment of ECO-REM was made at the 2nd High Level Experts Group Meeting on Energy (September 2012, Ankara) by I.R. Iran. The 1st Experts Group Meeting on establishment of ECO-REM, hosted by I.R. Iran was held on 5-6 November 2013 in the ECO Secretariat. The major outcome and recommendation of the Meeting was the concurrence to implement the initiative on establishment of ECO REM as a pilot project in the first stage with the participation of Iran and Turkiye and later with other interested ECO Member States for the maximum benefit of the ECO Region.

Since the inception of the ECO-REM Project at the 1st Experts Group Meeting on establishment of ECO-REM, three Iran-Turkiye Bilateral Meetings were organized.

The Terms of Reference (ToR) for hiring international and local consultants for preparation of a Feasibility Study on establishment of ECO-REM was overwhelmingly agreed through correspondence. The Secretariat has been exploring suitable mechanisms with the Member States and the international partners to define the roadmap for expediting the launch of the project. These mechanisms notably entail parallel uptake of this project in both bilateral and multilateral platforms, as well as capacity building activities on the relevant international experience.

## Recent developments, latest decisions and progress since the 33rd RPC

 The Republic of Tajikistan expressed its readiness to host the 2nd Experts Group Meeting on establishment of ECO-REM in September and October 2023, but this event was re-scheduled twice due to the lack of quorum.

 The Secretariat is involved in exploring highly capable international expert along with the partner organizations to explore possibility of launching this project and getting technical assistance.

 The Secretariat has started a dialogue with UNESCAP in 2022 to align ECO-REM with ESCAP’s Regional Roadmap on Power System Connectivity: Promoting Cross-border Electricity Connectivity for Sustainable Development.

## Expected outcome for 2024

* 2nd Experts Group Meeting on establishment of ECO-REM should be organized to uptake recent developments in the power interconnectivity of the region and define further actions. ECO has been preparing the ground for launching the Feasibility Study on establishment of ECO-REM. In order to do that the Terms of Reference for hiring international and local consultants for preparation of this Feasibility Study should be approved by high-level sectoral meetings and decision-making bodies.
* The next Energy Ministerial could be a milestone in advancement of this project (see Priority Area 1 of “Energy” section). The Member States are expected to follow up implementation of the roadmap on realization of the project adopted at the 4th ECO Energy Ministerial Meeting held in 2021.
* The Secretariat is supposed to explore the possibilities of funding the subject ToR with the prospect of providing equal seed financing by the Member States, ECO Secretariat from the ECO Feasibility and General Purpose Fund (FGPF), as well as possible regional/international donors. Subject to the needs and requirements, the Secretariat may also appeal the relevant financial/development agencies for additional fund-raising.
* The Secretariat will continue to expand international cooperation with relevant development partners, particularly UNESCAP and the Energy Charter to leverage the best international practices and attract donors for efficient launching of the ECO-REM project.

## Secretariat's recommendations

* The Council may call on the Member States to pursue proactive partnership within the Project on establishment of ECO Regional Electricity Market and invite them to render all necessary support for its successful development.
* The Council may request the Republic of Tajikistan or any other volunteer Member State to consider hosting the 2nd Experts Group Meeting on establishment of ECO-REM in the first quarter of 2024.
* The Council may encourage bilateral dimension of the project between Iran and Türkiye to decide on the further steps to launch the project on the basis of agreed ToR.
* The Council may acknowledge necessity of seed funding from the relevant ECO project financing scheme and task the Secretariat to continue exploring best international practices towards establishment of regional electricity markets through development cooperation with other international partners.

## Area conclusion

To create trust and promote political consensus for the ECO-REM Project, it is utmost important to promote continuous dialogue among the decision makers and stakeholders of the Member States. In this vein, the Member States are required to regularly hold discussions so that to define further steps on ways and means they would shape the regional electricity market in line with their national and regional interests.

## Other priorities/activities on energy

## ECO Vision approach and target

**Energy trade, production, consumption and transit patterns will be enhanced**

*(As outlined in Expected outcome (ii) of "Section C. Energy" of the “ECO Vision 2025”)*

## Background Information

ECO avails several relevant formats and platforms for enhancement of ECO cooperation in the fields of oil, gas and petrochemicals. The agendas of oil, gas and petrochemicals are traditionally covered by the High-Level Experts Group Meeting and the Meeting of ECO Public and Private Sector Energy/Petrochemical Consortiums. Their activities target on developing sustainable frameworks, particularly in energy trade and investments for enhanced contribution of regional energy cooperation to the existing patterns in the ECO Region. Furthermore, focusing ECO resources on key connectivity projects would demonstrate the Organization’s robustness and resilience as a whole.

 The Iran Chamber of Commerce, Industries, Mines and Agriculture (ICCIMA) was the initiator of establishment of the platform called “ECO Public and Private Sector Energy/Petrochemical Consortium/Companies”. Its 1st meeting was held in 16-17 August 2016 in Tehran. The meeting introduced the draft “Roadmap for Establishment of the ECO Energy Consortium” and establishment of “ECO Refinery Association”.

## Recent developments, latest decisions and progress since the 33rd RPC

 I.R. Iran expressed its readiness to host the 1st Meeting on Establishment of Refinery Association in ECO Region in September 2023. The event has been postponed due to the lack of quorum.

## Expected outcome for 2024

 It is expected that the Member States would benefit the ECO Strategy for Energy Cooperation and PoA 2030, as well as the outcomes of the 4th ECO Energy Ministerial Meeting and thus come up with certain proposals to implement their decisions.

 In this respect, it could be feasible to convene the ECO Public and Private Sector Energy/Petrochemical Consortium/Companies in order to review current developments in these sectors and define new steps for collaboration. Furthermore, the Member States are welcomed to initiate additional regional dialogue to advance possible cooperation in upstream, midstream and downstream areas.

1. **Secretariat’s recommendations**
* The Council may invite the relevant authorities of I.R. Iran or other interested Member States to consider hosting 2nd ECO Public and Private Sector Energy /Petrochemical Consortium/Companies, and the 1st Meeting on Establishment of Refinery Association in ECO Region in 2024;
* The Council may invite the Member States in coherent activities in upstream, midstream and downstream sectors through sharing their needs and interests in regional energy cooperation for stocktaking by the Secretariat the project-oriented ideas.

1. **Area Conclusion**

 ECO Region is abundant with hydrocarbon resources, which could be leveraged by new regional initiatives on production, consumption and transit operations. In the light of multiple complex challenges of political, economic and technical character, the Member States may wish to take more active engagement and define steps to address their regional priorities. In this regard, ECO platform seems suitable to bolster cooperation mechanisms and take advantage of regional partnership through exchange of experience, capacity building, possible trade solutions.

# Cooperation with international organizations

**I. ECO Vision approach and target**

Promotion of energy investments through advocating innovative incentives and close engagements with regional and global IFIs and development banks will be encouraged

Institutional advisory mechanism will be established for crafting policy linkages

*(As outlined in the Expected outcomes (vi) and (viii) respectively of "Section C. Energy" of the “ECO Vision 2025”)*

 The Secretariat has maintained regular interactions with the international organizations on the basis of mutual interest, most notably with the United Nations Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO), International Energy Charter, International Renewable Energy Agency (IRENA), Islamic Development Bank (IsDB), United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (UNESCAP) with a view to identify/develop possible strategic partnership frameworks, to get their financial/technical support to ECO projects and initiatives, as well as to expand ECO’s outreach and visibility.

### United Nations Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO)

* Driven by UNIDO’s interest and close involvement in developing a number of regional sustainable energy centers across the world, the ECO Secretariat pursues strong interaction with UNIDO from 2017 within the joint implementation of the Project on establishment of ECO Clean Energy Centre (CECECO).
* The Secretariat attended the 5th Steering Committee Meeting of the Global Network of Regional Sustainable Energy Centres (GN-SEC), held on 5-8 September 2022 in Vienna, Austria. The Meeting marked the stronger involvement of ECO to the GN-SEC platform and process as a new member. The GN-SEC represents an innovative south-south and triangular multi-stakeholder partnership to accelerate the energy and climate transformation in developing countries. The GN-SEC is currently becoming a formalized global platform to advocate for SDG-7, SDG-9 and SDG-13 and joint interests in international policy processes, and is hosted by UNIDO in Vienna, Austria. Meanwhile, ECO Secretariat delivered the presentation on CECECO Project and had the consultations on the sidelines with the GN-SEC members and supporting partners on collaboration opportunities, as well as on the ways and means of supporting the establishment of ECO Clean Energy Centre, its fund-raising aspects, institutional and technical design.
* On 16 March 2022, the Partners’ Roundtable Conference on the Start-up and Operationalization of The Clean Energy Centre of ECO Region (CECECO) was held in virtual format, jointly by the Ministry of Energy of the Republic of Azerbaijan and ECO Secretariat with the overall technical support of the United Nations Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO).

### Energy Charter

* The consultations between the ECO and Energy Charter Secretariats over the past few years revealed huge cooperation opportunities between two Organizations, specifically in view of policy advice and international consultancy with respect to the Project of establishment of ECO Regional Electricity Market (ECO-REM), as well as on capacity building and experience sharing.
* The 27th Energy Charter Conference (ECC) held on 25-26 November 2016 in Tokyo (Japan) granted ECO an observer status with the ECC – key decision-making body of this Organization. Previously, the 22nd ECO Council of Ministers (COM) Meeting, held on 28 February 2017 in Islamabad, granted the Energy Charter the observer status within ECO and approved the reciprocal observer status between ECO and ECC.
* Both Organizations regularly invite each other to their high level relevant events to exchange views and promote inter-regional cooperation.

### International Renewable Energy Agency (IRENA)

* As per the mandate of the 28th, 29th, 30th, 31st, 32nd and 33rd RPC Meetings, calling upon the strong cooperation with IRENA in the light of the ongoing prioritization of sustainable energy in ECO’s energy agenda, the Secretariat continued its dialogue with IRENA to explore the possibility of IRENA’s involvement in supporting sustainable energy undertakings of ECO.

### Islamic Development Bank (IsDB)

* ISDB and ECO has renewed cooperation aimed at prioritization of the interaction areas, as well as project partnership.
* On 16 March 2022, IsDB participated the Partners’ Roundtable Conference on the Start-up and Operationalization of The Clean Energy Centre of ECO region (CECECO) and expressed its readiness to continue cooperation.

## Recommended Actions

* The Council may request the Secretariat to pursue the partnerships and engagements with abovementioned organizations and other interested partners in the relevant fields in consultation with the Member States and setting out further roadmap for proceeding on it.
* The Council may recommend the Secretariat to take part in the relevant events with abovementioned organizations and other interested partners on a reciprocal basis with a view to promote cooperation for implementation of “ECO Vision 2025” and “ECO Strategy for Energy Cooperation 2030” and Plan of Actions 2030.

# MINERALS

# *Overall status*

The recent global outlook demonstrates continuous pressure on resource production systems and supply chains, rising environmental concerns, and fierce competition over resource access. These developments in the minerals markets are posing serious challenges for ECO Member States, while the minerals sector is one of the major contributors to their economies and industrial growth. As known well, many ECO Member States are abundant in mineral resources, as evidenced by the past mineral resource discovery and current production.

The rich minerals resources of the ECO Region, along with the available frameworks and initiatives may enable to identify the pragmatic ways and means for enhancing project-oriented ECO cooperation in minerals and mining industry. The cooperation in minerals is a key component of ECO’s strategy on sustainable economic growth that calls for working together to build minerals investment, grow the minerals sector, expand trade and ensure sustainable approaches to minerals development. Furthermore, international cooperation and outreach in minerals sector should always be in the focus of regional economic organizations as ECO, through which they will strive for the increased access to the advanced expertise and experience.

ECO represents several full-fledged platforms, which could trigger the mutually beneficial regional cooperation in the field of minerals. The Minerals Experts Group Meeting (MEGM), Heads of Surveying and Mapping Organizations (HSMO) and the Geomatics Committee are the explicit examples of these mechanisms. Over the past period, ECO has been active in organizing certain capacity-building activities in the relevant sectors.

Currently, there are three project proposals in the minerals sector. To advance all of these projects in minerals, the initiator country – I.R. Iran together with the Secretariat may appeal one of the next CPR meetings for consideration and allocation of 50000USD from the ECO FGPF for each of these proposals. In this scenario, upon allocation of the required budget by GSI and ECO Secretariat, the preparation of the contract will be undertaken by ECO Secretariat and the project managers.

The 8th ECO Minerals Expert Group Meeting and training courses conducted under the auspices of the Geomatics Committee, namely the "Basics of Synthetic Aperture Radar (SAR) Remote Sensing on Minerals", “Role of Cartography in Optimal Presentation of Spatial and Statistical Information” and Capacity Building Workshop on the establishment of ECO Spatial Data Infrastructure (SDI) to combat the Challenges of Food Security in ECO Region” became key deliverables on the subject area.

To this end, regular meetings of experts in minerals, as well as cross-cutting nature of geomatics-related activities are the major denominators to enhance regional cooperation and explore new areas of interaction in the ECO’s minerals profile. There is a dire need for streamlining the project-oriented cooperation and facilitating the implementation of decisions in minerals.

## Priority area: Streamlining project-oriented cooperation in the field of minerals

#

## ECO Vision approach and target

##

 To increase standard of living, quality of life, economic welfare and well-being of people through adopting social protection and environment preservation policies in the region.

(*As outlined in “Section E: Economic Growth and Productivity” and "Section F. Social Welfare and Environment" of the “ECO Vision 2025”*)

## Background information

ECO avails several platforms for building cooperation in minerals sector, namely the Minerals Experts Group Meeting (MEGM), Meetings of the Heads of Surveying and Mapping Organizations (HSMO) and the Geomatics Committee Meetings. To the moment, eight MEGM, three Geomatics Committee and two HSMO Meetings have been convened.

Currently, there are three project proposals in the minerals sector, which were proposed by I.R. Iran during 6th and 7th MEGMs. The first project proposal is the “Preparation of Eco-Environmental Quality Index (EQI) Map (1:5M) of the ECO Region (ECO-EQI)”. Its total budget is 300000USD, out of which 250000 will be covered by the Geological Survey of Iran and 50000 may be allocated from FGPF. Another project proposal is the “Preparation of Spiroclast of Mobile belt between Gondwana and Eurasia”**.** The project cost is estimated at 50000USD and in-kind contribution. In-kind contribution is expected to be covered by Tabriz University of Iran and 50000USD may be allocated from FGPF. The third project proposal is the “Geochemical Exploration of Precious and Industrial Minerals in Desert lands in ECO Region”. Its objective is the elaboration of an effective and wide-sampling method for identification of high potential regions for exploration of precious and industrial minerals. Its total budget is estimated at 300000USD, out of which ECO may cover 15% and GSI 85%.

## Recent developments, latest decisions and progress since the 32nd RPC

Several key developments have been observed since the 32nd RPC Meeting in advancement of project-oriented activities. Most notably:

1. The Secretariat in partnership with I.R. Iran co-organized the Validation Meeting on 26 April 2022 in Tehran aimed at involvement of the Member States and approval of validity of the ToRs of the aforementioned three projects. The participants of the Member States who have attended the meeting supported the projects. The Meeting report has been adopted by silence procedure on 20 May 2022 soliciting to render support, where possible, to these projects.
2. In pursuance with the outcome of the Virtual Capacity Building Workshop on the establishment of ECO Spatial Data Infrastructure to combat the Challenges of Food Security in ECO Region, hosted by the Islamic Republic of Pakistan on July 5-7, 2022, the experts from Australia and Singapore in cooperation with Survey of Pakistan proposed new project initiative entitled: “Fabricating ECO Spatial Data Infrastructure for Food Security: Synergy Through a Shared Vision”.
3. During the 8th MEGM, held on November 13-17, 2022 in Isfahan (I.R. Iran), Geological Survey of Iran proposed new project initiative: “Service Catalog and Metadata System Geospatial of ECO Member State”. Furthermore, Uzbekistan expressed readiness to cooperate in the project Landslide Hazard Zonation Map of ECO Member States.
4. The ECO Secretariat in partnership with the Chairmanship of the Republic of Azerbaijan in ECO jointly organized the International Roundtable “New horizons for enhanced regional cooperation in the field of minerals” on 26 October 2023 in Baku. It was held in a hybrid format on the margins of the International Geology and Mining Forum (26-27 October). The Roundtable addressed renewed mechanisms and solutions for enhancement of regional cooperation in the minerals sector with the strong focus on just, resource-efficient and sustainable transition. The Roundtable brought together around 30 participants from different stakeholders engaged in geology and mining. The meeting was inaugurated by Mr. Mukhtar Babayev, Minister of Ecology and Natural Resources of the Republic of Azerbaijan and Ambassador Hüseyin Avni Bıçaklı, Deputy Secretary General of ECO. In the end of the event, the interactive dialogue among participants was undertaken to stimulate discussions on ways and solutions how international organizations could facilitate regional cooperation and produce key policy recommendations.

## Expected outcomes and focused issues for 2024

In order to optimize project implementation and maintain financial sustainability, Secretariat enquired I.R. Iran to prioritize the order of launching the projects. Secretariat is thus expecting response in order to prioritize one of the following projects and apply for seed money from ECO’s relevant fund:

* ECO-Environmental Quality Index Map of the ECO Region (ECO-EQI);
* Spiroclast of Mobile belt between Gondwana and Eurasia;
* Geochemical Exploration of Precious & Industrial Minerals in Desert Lands of ECO Member States.

Meanwhile, the Member States are expected to come up with their feedbacks on the outcomes of 8th MEGM and further developments, particularly on the following issues:

* Initiative on “Service Catalog and Metadata System Geospatial of ECO Member State”;
* Initiative on “Fabricating ECO Spatial Data Infrastructure for Food Security: Synergy Through a Shared Vision”;
* Initiative on “Landslide Hazard Zonation Map of ECO Member States”;
* To initiate proposals/projects as a preparation of 9th MEGM expected to be hosted by Pakistan *(EME Directorate circulated a Note Verbale EME/2023/1241 dated 24 August 2023 and sent through the diplomatic channels to Pakistan regarding the holding of the 9th MEGM. The feedback is awaited).*

## Secretariat's recommendations

* The Council may call upon the Member States and the Secretariat to identify renewed mechanisms and solutions for enhancement of regional cooperation in the minerals sector with the strong focus on just, resource-efficient and sustainable transition.
* The Council may welcome the readiness of Islamic Republic of Pakistan to host the 9th ECO Minerals Experts Group Meeting in 2024, as proposed during the 8th Meeting of subject group.
* The Council may invite Member States to follow up the outcomes of 8th ECO MEGM through proposing concrete steps and task the Secretariat to facilitate implementation of the decisions as the next step to prepare appropriate ground for the next meeting of MEGM.
1. **Area conclusion**

Although the number of the projects initiated over the past few years has been impressive, they need to be advanced in a coherent and systematic manner. The interaction among the Member States, participation level in the events and dynamics of project development still remain insufficient.

Indeed, the minerals is one of the unfolded promising sector, which can play crucial role in enhancement of economic cooperation in the region through fruitful projects with the focus on trade and investment, capacity building and know-how. The year of 2024 could be a milestone in revisiting the minerals cooperation and keeping cooperation momentum.

**Other activities in the field of minerals and capacity building efforts**

## Background information

Over the past period, ECO has been active in organizing certain capacity-building activities in the relevant sectors. Several training courses conducted under the auspices of the Geomatics Committee, namely the "Basics of Synthetic Aperture Radar (SAR) Remote Sensing on Minerals", “Role of Cartography in Optimal Presentation of Spatial and Statistical Information” and Capacity Building Workshop on the establishment of ECO Spatial Data Infrastructure (SDI) to combat the Challenges of Food Security in ECO Region” became key deliverables on the subject area.

One of the key outcomes of the 3rd Geomatics Committee Meeting, held on 18 October 2021 in a virtual format, was the proposal to establish ECO SDI or Regional SDI for sharing and collection of data under ECO reference framework. This initiative was not so far grasped by any Member State.

## Recent developments, latest decisions and progress since the 32nd RPC

Since the last RPC three capacity building workshops have been held respectively in I.R. Iran and I.R. Pakistan:

1. Training Course on "Basics of Synthetic Aperture Radar (SAR) Remote Sensing on Minerals"was held virtually on 20-22 June 2022. The participants were introduced thorough presentations on application of synthetic aperture radar to the different areas of civil usage and answered questions of audience.
2. Virtual Capacity Building Workshop on the establishment of ECO Spatial Data Infrastructure (SDI) to combat the Challenges of Food Security in ECO Region was jointly organized by the Survey of Pakistan and Geological Survey of Pakistan in cooperation with the Economic Cooperation Organization (ECO) on 5-7 July 2022.
3. Training Course on the “Role of Cartography in Optimal Presentation of Spatial and Statistical Information was held on 7-8 August 2023 at the ECO Secretariat. During the two-day training course, participants introduced in-depth presentations on the topic, including introduction, history, principles and ethical considerations of Cartography.
4. **Expected outcomes and focused issues for 2022/2023**

 At the 3rd ECO Geomatics Committee Meeting, particularly Iran and Pakistan expressed their readiness to contribute further to the capacity-building activities of ECO region in the areas covered by geomatics.

 According to the ToR of ECO Geomatics Committee, the next meeting should have been held in 2023. It would be appropriate if the Member States may take ownership and volunteer to host its next meeting.

 Furthermore, the National Cartographic Center of Iran expressed its readiness to host the 3rd Meeting of ECO Heads of Surveying and Mapping Organizations in 2022. Since it could not be held, the Member States may volunteer to convene it in the year of 2024.

*(The 3rd Meeting of HSMO did not take place due to the lack of quorum. The meeting is expected to take place in the first quarter of next year).*

### IV. Secretariat's recommendations

* The Council may encourage the Member States to volunteer to host/co-host the training courses for capacity building and sharing best practices in the ECO Region on various pertinent topics, such as Spatial Data Infrastructure; Scientific GNSS Data Processing; Local Geodetic Datum; Regional Deformation Study of the Earth; Orthophoto Generation; Cadastral, and Cartographic Maps and Atlas, in accordance with the outcomes of 3rd ECO Geomatics Committee.
* The Council may invite the volunteer Member States to host the 4th Meeting of ECO Geomatics Committee aimed at exploring project-oriented opportunities in regional cooperation on geomatics and request the Member States to ensure active participation at the meeting.
* The Council may invite volunteer Member State to consider hosting the 3rd Meeting of ECO Heads of Surveying and Mapping Organizations and encourage all Member States to actively participate and enrich the agenda of the subject meeting by providing project-oriented regional cooperation proposals.

## Area conclusion

Overall, the international cooperation and strong outreach have always been in the focus of ECO, through which it strives for the increased access to the advanced expertise and experience. Many of the benchmarks set by the leading stakeholders of minerals sector presents an opportunity for ECO to tap world-leading practices and adapt them to suit regional circumstances.

Some Member States have been actively pursuing and contributing to the capacity- building activities in the minerals sector over the past few years. It would be appropriate if other Member States could get the ownership of capacity-building by organizing similar events and activities. On the other hand, countries which undertake such activities had a great opportunity to exchange advanced experience, raise awareness and uptake possible regional cooperation.

# ENVIRONMENT

# *Overall Status*

The ECO Region, although to different degrees, are prone to environmental challenges and extreme climate conditions which can negatively affect the economic and social welfare of its Member States. ECO countries are expected to be increasingly aware and committed to addressing the environment and climate challenges, including through national action plans. Environmental degradation and climate change impacts are highly likely to be felt across borders in the region, and if not properly addressed and managed, this could lead to risks and vulnerabilities. Addressing ecological and climate challenges should therefore involve trans-boundary responses.

Global environment and climate change-related challenges have induced the need for enhanced cooperation in the ECO Region through integrating regional and global approaches in developing projects and initiating partnership frameworks. Some ECO Member States are undergoing the tremendous socio-economic transformation which has an impact on the environment and their natural resources.

 Given these growing challenges, designation of the environment and impacts of climate change as a cross-sectoral priority of ECO, and despite being a relatively new sector for collaboration, ECO’s environmental profile has to increase over the coming years. “ECO Vision 2025” and its Implementation Framework has a certain reflection and uptake on environment, notably it envisages the support to environmental sustainability of the region; implementation of regional projects in climate and biodiversity areas; and ECO’s recognition as a regional group/partner in the global environment community.

ECO Secretariat strives for raising awareness and paving the way to integrate and mainstream environment and climate resilience in development planning, programming, and budgeting of ECO Member States, and stimulating policy debates for developing partnership frameworks with a view to address the environmental challenges/concerns in the ECO Region. The revision process of the “Framework Plan of Action on Environment Cooperation and Global Warming for ECO Member States (2016-2020)” – which serves a policy framework for the Organization’s all-inclusive cooperation in different fields/segments of environment – and the “Work Plan on Biodiversity in ECO Region (2016-2020)” are still ongoing. Although the 6th ECO Ministerial Meeting on Environment and the 7th Working Group Meeting on Environment have not been held in the Kyrgyz Republic during the year 2023 as scheduled, convening the 7th Working Group Meeting on Environment in the Secretariat and the ECO Informal Ministerial Meeting on Environment on the sidelines of the 2023 UN Climate Change Conference (UNFCCC COP 28) in Dubai can provide suitable platforms to pave the way for the adoption of the new revised documents on climate change, biodiversity and land degradation, and consolidation and advancement of ECO’s environmental agenda in the light of the rapidly evolving global environmental and climate agenda.

In the past few years, “The Regional Project to Combat Desertification with a Special Emphasis on Dust Haze and Sand Storm in the ECO Region” has represented the only operational and meantime, flagship project in the subject dimension.

The Antalya Workshop on Development of Project to Combat Desertification in the ECO region – ECO LandCare in December 2021, produced a Roadmap for determining the most efficient means to implement the 1st phase of the ECO LandCare Initiative (ECO-LCI). As an outcome of the Antalya meeting, the ECO Institute for Environmental Science and Technology (ECO-IEST) designed a brief document to aid in the LCI's inception and determine these means. Later on, the ECO Secretariat received an alternative project proposal titled “Capacity building of countries in the ECO Region on desertification, land degradation and erosion monitoring system" developed by the line ministry of the Republic of Türkiye. The issue is in standstill and needs to be advanced.

In parallel, ECO Secretariat maintained its collaboration and consultations and expanded its outreach with the relevant UN agencies and conventions, namely UNEP, UNFCCC, UNCBD, UNCCD and UNFF in particular for better preparation and implementation of the aforementioned Work Plans and provision of support for and capacity-building activities within the ECO Region. Given their differences in level of income and development, the ECO Member States can take advantage of strengthening international and regional cooperation, especially in the areas of policy coordination and agenda setting, research, knowledge and information sharing, technical assistance and capacity building, and leveraging finance.

Furthermore, ECO Secretariat in partnership with the Chairmanship of the Republic of Azerbaijan in ECO have developed the Regional Initiative on Resource Efficiency, Sustainability and Circular Economy in the ECO Region (RESCUE). The key overarching objective of RESCUE is to create a regional cooperation platform that will advocate for a just transition to a resource-efficient, circular and regenerative economy, as well as support coherent policies for circularity and more sustainable management of natural resources.

To deliver on the environment, we need a whole-of-government, a whole-of-society, and a whole-of-region approach, adequate financing, and positive yet disruptive practices underpinned by knowledge and science. In such a context, the ongoing discussions about the creation of a High-Level Dialogue Platform on Environmental Cooperation in the ECO region could be of great significance.

## Priority area 1: Implementation of the Framework Plan of Action on Environment Cooperation and Global Warming for ECO Member States (2016-2020)

## ECO Vision approach and target

 Environmental sustainability of the region will be supported through environmentally friendly regional economic and social cooperation

*(As outlined in the Expected Outcome (iv.) of "Section F. Social Welfare and Environment" of the “ECO Vision 2025”)*

## Background information

 The 5th ECO Ministerial Meeting on Environment (15-17 December 2014, Istanbul) decided to extend the “Framework Plan of Action on Environment Cooperation and Global Warming for ECO Member States” till the end of 2020. The Meeting mandated the ECO Secretariat and the ECO Institute for Environmental Science and Technology (ECO-IEST) to make, in consultation with the Member States, necessary adjustments in the priority areas of this Plan of Action (PoA), and continue with its implementation using the available funds, taking into account the need for its updating in line with the recent and ongoing developments at the global and regional levels.

In line with the ministerial decisions and in order to monitor implementation of the PoA, the National Focal Points are supposed to regularly provide the Secretariat with their National Progress Reports (NPRs) on implementation of the PoA, as well as on the state of environment in their countries.

## Recent developments, latest decisions and progress since the 33rd RPC

National Progress Reports (NPRs) are key in evaluating the implementation status of the subject PoA and thus helping to identify the weaknesses or areas needed to be addressed by both the Secretariat and the Member States.

In 2023, the ECO Secretariat while waiting for the views and suggestion by the Member States on the draft of the ECO Cooperation Framework on the Environment and its annexes requested the Member States, in accordance with the ECO Work Program adopted by the 33rd Meeting of the Regional Planning Council (RPC), to share their NPRs for the year 2022, reiterating the importance of these Reports and their submission on a yearly basis which could facilitate and contribute to providing all stakeholders with a comprehensive image of the latest state of the environment in the ECO region, and determining the priority areas for action and regional collaboration. This ongoing invitation has not yet received any reaction from the Member States.

## Expected outcomes and focused issues for 2024

### Preparation of an ECO Cooperation Framework on the Environment and its annexes on climate change and biodiversity (2023-2030)

The Secretariat has examined, in cooperation with ECO-IEST, the subject Framework Plan of Action in view of “ECO Vision 2025”, recent global and regional environmental patterns, and rapidly evolving global environmental agenda. The end result of this process has been disseminated to the ECO Member States by the Secretariat as the draft of the ECO Cooperation Framework on the Environment and its annexes.

### Regional Initiative on Resource Efficiency, Sustainability and Circular Economy in the ECO Region (RESCUE)

ECO Secretariat in partnership with the Chairmanship of the Republic of Azerbaijan in ECO have developed the Regional Initiative on Resource Efficiency, Sustainability and Circular Economy in the ECO Region (RESCUE). The Concept Note of RESCUE was circulated among the Member States by the Secretariat’s Note Verbale No. EME/2023/1614 dated 8 October 2023.

The key overarching objective of RESCUE is to create a regional cooperation platform that will advocate for a just transition to a resource-efficient, circular and regenerative economy, as well as support coherent policies for circularity and more sustainable management of natural resources. The initiative envisages a number of expected collaborative activities in a short- and mid-term perspective. Overall, the circular economy model, which is a new sustainability paradigm increasingly gaining global prominence over the past decade as a facilitator of the long-term growth, seems promising for ECO Region as well. The year of 2024 could be a milestone in approval of RESCUE and launching joint activities within this initiative.

### 6th ECO Ministerial Meeting on Environment

The 6th ECO Ministerial Meeting on Environment is expected to stimulate the high-level policy dialogue with a view to promoting ongoing ECO activities/projects in environment, addressing the regional and global environmental challenges, and streamlining ECO environmental agenda in conformity with “ECO Vision 2025” and UN 2030 Agenda. The Meeting will focus, among others, on the outcome decisions of 5th Ministerial, state of play in ECO environmental agenda, national environmental policies to enhance regional synergy, strengthening ECO cooperation with relevant international organizations, and promoting environmentally-friendly projects and programs of common interest. This meeting was scheduled to be convened in the Kyrgyz Republic in 2023, however, the Kyrgyz authorities later on declared that they were not in a position to hold this meeting.

In the meantime, the Republic of Azerbaijan has extended an invitation for the Informal Ministerial Meeting on Environment under the theme of "Accelerating the Transition towards a Resource-Efficient, Sustainable and Circular Region of the Economic Cooperation Organization”, to be held on the sidelines of the 2023 UN Climate Change Conference in Dubai in December.

### 7th Working Group Meeting on Environment, back-to-back with the 2nd Experts Meeting on Climate Change and Biodiversity

The 7th Working Group Meeting on Environment was also initially scheduled to be convened in the Kyrgyz Republic in 2023, which rescheduled later on to be held in the Secretariat in November 2023. This Working Group Meeting on Environment could be an appropriate occasion for discussing the aforementioned draft of the ECO Cooperation Framework on the Environment and its annexes and submitting it to the Ministerial Meeting for possible approval. The 7th Meeting can also streamline the regional cooperation on environment in the light of new emerging and rapidly evolving environmental and climate change agenda at the global level.

## Secretariat's recommendations

* The Council may call upon volunteer Member States to host the formerly pledged ECO meetings on the environment with a view to promote ongoing ECO activities/projects in this field, addressing the regional and global environmental challenges, and streamlining ECO environmental agenda in conformity with “ECO Vision 2025” and UN 2030 Agenda.
* The Council may invite the Member States to consider the ECO Cooperation Framework on the Environment and its annexes, as well as to incorporate its components into their relevant national plans and programs.
* The Council may welcome the Regional Initiative on Resource Efficiency, Sustainability and Circular Economy in the ECO Region (RESCUE) as a promising regional cooperation platform that will advocate for a just transition to a resource-efficient, circular and regenerative economy, as well as support coherent policies for circularity and more sustainable management of natural resources.
* The Council may encourage the Member States to submit their environmental NPRs to the Secretariat on an annual basis during the first quarter of each calendar year.
* The Council may recommend the Secretariat to continue its activities with the aim of finding ways and means for strengthening collaboration with the different UN environmental entities. It is noteworthy that the Secretary-General has continued his official communications in this respect with the UN high-ranking officials on the environment in 2023.

## Area Conclusion

After the expiration of the ECO Framework Plan of Action on Environmental Cooperation and Global Warming (2011-2015), which had been extended till the end of 2020, the subject PoA and its annexes needed to be revised / revisited. The Secretariat has carried out this revision in cooperation with ECO-IEST, and provided the Member States with the draft of the ECO Cooperation Framework on the Environment and the sectoral annexes in view of “ECO Vision 2025”, as well as recent global and regional environmental patterns. The finalization and implementation of the above-mentioned Framework requires strong resolve and concerted efforts by the Member States.

The Regional Initiative on Resource Efficiency, Sustainability and Circular Economy in the ECO Region (RESCUE) could be another endeavour to build regional resilience and sustainability in a long-term perspective based on a resource-efficient, circular and regenerative economy, and thus position ECO Region as a proponent of just and innovative transition in international arena.

## Priority area 2: Combating Desertification with a Special Emphasis on Sand and Dust Storms in the Region

## ECO Vision approach and target

Regional projects in climate/biodiversity areas through partnership with relevant international stakeholders with available regional and global funding will be implemented.

*(As outlined in Expected Outcome (v.) of "Section F. Social Welfare and Environment" of the “ECO Vision 2025”)*

The Regional Project to Combat Desertification with a Special Emphasis on Dust Haze and Sand Storm in the ECO Region will be implemented.

*(As outlined in the Implementation Framework under "Section F. Social Welfare and Environment" of the “ECO Vision 2025”)*

## Background information

Desertification is a phenomenon that ranks among the greatest environmental challenges of our time. The 4th ECO Ministerial Meeting on Environment (9 June 2011, Tehran) welcomed the proposal for developing a regional project to combat desertification with a special emphasis on dust haze and sand storm in the ECO Region.

The ECO-IEST has submitted the feasibility study and initial project proposal, prepared by Mr. Peter Hunnam, the International Consultant from Australia to ECO Secretariat and Member States, and made initial preparation for organizing the Consultation Workshop.

The Project Development Consultation Workshop on Combating Desertification with a special emphasis on Dust Haze and Sand Storm in the ECO Region was jointly organized by ECO Secretariat and ECO-IEST on 5-6 July 2017 in ECO Secretariat with active participation of the Member States. During the Workshop, the International Consultant of the Project made a detailed presentation on “ECO LandCare: A Collaborative Programme by the ECO Member States to combat land degradation, sand and dust storms”, having elaborated on various aspects of the Project Outline.

## Recent developments, latest decisions and progress since the 32nd RPC

 The Antalya Workshop on Development of Project to Combat Desertification in the ECO region – ECO LandCare in December 2021, produced a Roadmap for determining the most efficient means to implement the 1st phase of the ECO LandCare Initiative (ECO-LCI). The Meeting concluded mandating ECO-IEST to follow up efficient implementation mechanism of ECO Landcare project and recommending the Member States to explore opportunities to enhance cooperation in exchange of best practices amongst them to address challenges of land degradation.

In response to the Member States' request to the Secretariat during the Antalya meeting, the ECO-IEST worked out a brief document to aid in the LCI's inception and determine the most efficient means to implement the 1st phase of the ECO LandCare Initiative (ECO-LCI). The brief document was not supported by the Republic of Türkiye. Later on, the ECO Secretariat received a project proposal titled “Capacity building of countries in the ECO Region on desertification, land degradation and erosion monitoring system" developed by the Ministry of Environment, Urbanization and Climate Change of the Republic of Türkiye. The Secretariat has conveyed some views and comments in this regard for consideration by the relevant Turkish authorities. The feedback is awaited. The issue is in standstill and needs to be advanced.

Recently, the International Conference on Combatting Sand and Dust Storms was convened by the Government of the Islamic Republic of Iran in Tehran on 9-10 September 2023, following the adoption of UN General Assembly Resolution A/RES/77/171 entitled “Combating sand and dust storms”in December 2022, on curtailing the global issue of sand and dust storms. The purpose of this intergovernmental forum in which the ECO Deputy Secretary General delivered a statement, was to mobilize stronger commitment for coordinated actions at the sub-regional, regional, and global levels, to reduce risks and strengthen resilience to the negative transboundary impact of sand and dust storms.

## Expected outcomes and focused issues for 2024

Taking into account that the Secretariat has conveyed its views and comments on the project proposal by the Republic of Türkiye, the relevant Turkish authorities are invited to expedite updating the Secretariat about their opinions in this respect. More consultation and coordination among the Member States are still required with a view to find a way to agree upon a common ground document for guiding the regional activities on the significant issue of land degradation.

## Secretariat's recommendations

* The Council may request the Republic of Türkiye to expedite following up on their project proposal and sharing their opinions in this respect and the way forward.
* The Council may also wish to invite the Member States once again to volunteer to host a meeting with the aim of elaborating the ways and means of moving forward in this collaborative program of ECO on land degradation.
* The Council may welcome the International Conference on Combatting Sand and Dust Storms hosted by the Government of the Islamic Republic of Iran, following the adoption of UN General Assembly Resolution A/RES/77/171 and invite Member States to mobilize coordinated actions in this respect at the sub-regional, regional, and global levels.
* The Council may invite the Islamic Republic of Iran to notify a new date for convening the Experts Consultation Meeting on Risk Resilience Management of Sand and Dust Storm initially scheduled to be held in 2023.

## Area Conclusion

“The Regional Project to Combat Desertification with a Special Emphasis on Dust Haze and Sand Storm in the ECO Region” has represented the only operational project in the environmental dimension over the past four years. Its Project Development Phase was finalized in April 2018 and as an outcome of its implementation, the Project Proposal on “ECO LandCare: A Collaborative Programme by the ECO Member States to combat land degradation, sand and dust storms” has been elaborated.

Increased frequency and severity of droughts during the last few decades along with the challenges related to development agenda and population growth have aggravated land degradation in several parts of the Region and increased sand and dust storms, which overall threatens the livelihood and welfare of people across the region. All these challenges necessitate the elaboration and early launching of the ECO LandCare Programme with a view to halt and reverse land degradation and associated impacts in the ECO Region through long-term collaborative efforts. The implementation of the 1st phase of ECO LandCare Programme, in case of consensus among the member states, could serve as an introductory step to such essential collaborative efforts.

Taking into account the increasing significance of combating desertification and sand and dust storms in the region, this issue should be seen as an integral part of the climate change mitigation and adaptation, conservation of biodiversity and land degradation management strategies.

## Priority area 3: Addressing serious threats to biodiversity and sustainability of ecosystems in the ECO Region

## ECO Vision approach and target

Regional projects in climate/biodiversity areas through partnership with relevant international stakeholders with available regional and global funding will be implemented.

 *(As outlined in Expected Outcomes (v.) of "Section F. Social Welfare and Environment" of the “ECO Vision 2025”)*

## Background information

After the expiration of the “Work Plan on Biodiversity in ECO Region (2016-2020)”, the process of revising and updating this work plan started. Later on, the new draft entitled “ECO Cooperation Framework on the Environment” and its annexes including “Work Program on Biodiversity in ECO Region” was circulated among the Member States to seek their views.

## Recent developments, latest decisions and progress since the 33rd RPC

The RPC33 like RPC32, requested the Member States to voluntarily host the relevant biodiversity meetings envisaged in the ECO Calendar of Events for 2022.

In the meantime, the Secretary-General had some communications with the CBD Executive Secretary on different issues as: submitting views on the draft Long-Term Strategic Approach to Mainstreaming Biodiversity and the associated Action Plan, welcoming the ratification and launch of the Global Biodiversity Framework Fund and seeking support from the CBD Secretariat for the ECO region to better explore and identify the ways and means of addressing environment and biodiversity-related issues.

## Expected outcomes and focused issues for 2024

### Work Program on Biodiversity in ECO Region (2023-2030)

After the expiration of the “Work Plan on Biodiversity in ECO Region (2016-2020)” the process of updating this work plan started and a copy of the draft “Work Program on Biodiversity in ECO Region (2023-2030)” was circulated among the Member States to seek their views.

Since Member States have not shared any negative views on the aforementioned draft Program, it is expected that this document could be finalized and approved in the course of the upcoming ECO scheduled environmental meetings. This could be an outstanding step and regional contribution in light of the recent global developments in biodiversity, particularly theadoption of the “Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework” (GBF) and the ratification and launch of the Global Biodiversity Framework Fund.

## Secretariat's recommendations

* The Council may request the Member States to be actively involved in preparing the ground for collective environmental action and cooperation in the ECO region through hosting and attending the environmental meetings held in the ECO Secretariat and region, notably the biodiversity-related events.

## Area Conclusion

Given the latest developments in the field of biodiversity, particularly theadoption of the “Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework”, the biodiversity-related cooperation needs to be enhanced in ECO’s environmental agenda over the coming years. This interest has to be sought through different ways and means including validation and implementation of the revised “Work Program on Biodiversity in ECO Region (2023-2030)”. Its adoption could be a remarkable introductory step towards the conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity, and indicative of solidarity with the recently adopted Global Biodiversity Framework. This could be instrumental in facilitating capacity building and enhanced cooperation in conservation and sustainable use and management of biodiversity at the national and regional levels.

# Cooperation with the environment-related international organizations/entities /instruments

## ECO Vision approach and target

ECO will be recognized as a regional group/partner in the global environment community

*(As outlined in Expected Outcomes (vi.) of "Section F. Social Welfare and Environment" of the “ECO Vision 2025”)*

## Background information

The 5th ECO Ministerial Meeting on Environment (15-17 December 2014, Istanbul, Turkey) mandated ECO Secretariat to:

* Seek observer status, where applicable, in environmental conventions to which ECO Member States are parties;
* Participate in the relevant environmental fora as observer, including UNEP, UNFCCC, CBD, UNCCD, UNFF, UNESCAP, etc.

The Secretariat has expanded its outreach through active engagement in the important environmental fora. Since 2015, ECO has been granted Observer Status at the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), United Nations Environment Assembly (UNEA), United Nations Forum on Forests (UNFF), Conference of Parties (COP) process of the UN Conventions, namely, UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), UN Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD) and UN Convention on Biological Diversity (UNCBD).

## Recent developments, latest decisions and progress since the 33rd RPC

ECO Secretariat has continued to reinforce its interactions and consultations to further explore ways and means of strengthening collaboration, and expanding its outreach with the relevant UN agencies and conventions, namely UNEP, UNFCCC, UNCCD, CBD, UNFF and the Global Environmental Facility (GEF), in particular for following up on last year’s communications and interactions with these entities, better preparation and implementation of the ECO environmental Work Programs, and assessing the feasibility of a possible ECO regional strategy on the environment in future.

In such a context, the ECO Secretary General has continued his communications and interactions with the heads of commissions and secretariats of some environmental conventions and forum including the Executive Secretary of the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP), the Executive Secretary of CBD, the Director of the UNFF Secretariat.

The ECO Secretary General virtually took part and delivered a statement in the Seventy-ninth Session of ESCAP under the theme of “Accelerating climate action in Asia and the Pacific for sustainable development”.

The ECO Secretary General in his letter addressed to Under-Secretary-General of the United Nations and the Executive Secretary of ESCAP underscored the ECO's interest in building a strong partnership with ESCAP. Taking into account that ESCAP Secretariat supports inclusive, resilient and sustainable development in the region by generating action-oriented knowledge, and by providing technical assistance and capacity-building services, the ECO Secretary General requested the Executive Secretary of ESCAP to facilitate such assistance to the ECO Secretariat and Member States for transition towards climate-resilient and low-carbon development in the region.

The ECO Secretary General in another letter addressed to the CBD Executive Secretary articulated that the ECO Secretariat would like to play a greater role in proper implementation of the UN Climate Change Agenda at regional and global levels in the years ahead, especially through prioritizing areas of cooperation, undertaking feasible projects and enhancing regional concerted actions to capture opportunities and tackle the adverse impacts of environmental degradation for the benefits of its Member States and global community. He clarified in this letter that to this end, the ECO Region is looking forward to a strong support from CBD Secretariat to better explore and identify the ways and means of addressing environment and biodiversity-related issues.

The ECO Secretary General in a couple of letters to and also a virtual meeting with the Director of the UNFF Secretariat expressed the Organization's willingness to further collaborate with the UNFF Secretariat and requested its stronger support to the ECO Member States in their efforts to coordinate and harmonize policies, strategies, and actions to accelerate the implementation of the UN Strategic Plan for Forests and the achievement of the Global Forest Goals.

The ECO Deputy Secretary General delivered a statement in the International Conference on Combatting Sand and Dust Storms convened in Tehran and had a bilateral meeting with the Director of the UNFF Secretariat.

The ECO Secretariat participated at the UNFF Expert Group Meeting on the Global Forest Financing Facilitation Network (GFFFN) in Nairobi and suggested UNFF members considering the revision of existing GFFFN guidelines to make intergovernmental regional and sub-regional organizations eligible to receive GFFFN support.

The ECO Secretary General intends to attend the United Nations Climate Change Conference (COP 28), scheduled to be held in Dubai in December 2023. On the sideline of this Conference, an ECO Informal Ministerial Meeting on Environment is due to be held on the invitation of the Minister of Ecology and Natural Resources of the Republic of Azerbaijan under the theme of "Accelerating the Transition towards a Resource-Efficient, Sustainable and Circular Region of the Economic Cooperation Organization”.

## Expected outcomes and focused issues for 2024

 The Secretariat's efforts for expansion of its cooperation and outreach through active engagement with important environmental fora in line with the mandates of the 15th ECO Summit and Ashgabat Consensus for Action’s directive to reinforce cooperation in the field of environment and climate change, will continue in 2024. It will particularly focus on following up with UNFFS, UNEP and UNFCCC on the recent interaction at different levels of the Organizations with the aim of benefiting from their expertise and experience in enhancing a more enabling climate for environment and climate-related cooperation in the region and requesting further assistance of these bodies to the countries to promote sustainability and climate action in the region.

Although the ECO Secretariat will passionately continue to find ways and means to establish and enhance collaboration with the above-mentioned entities, the reactions from the other sides in the majority of cases have not been encouraging enough so far.

## Secretariat's recommendations

* The Council may request the Secretariat to continue substantive consultations with multilateral environmental entities to explore ways and means for establishing fruitful partnerships with them on different environmental issues.
* The Council may welcome/take note of the ECO Secretariat’s efforts and interaction with the UNFF Secretariat to further enhance cooperation with the UNFFS for soliciting technical and financial support and enhancing its visibility in forest-related issues especially through following up on its proposal for revising the existing Global Forest Financing Facilitation Network (GFFFN) guidelines to enhance the GFFFN’s ability to extend its activity beyond country support by making intergovernmental regional and sub-regional organizations like ECO eligible to receive GFFFN support.
* The Council may invite the Member States to demonstrate stronger political will and further investment in regional cooperation on environmental issues which is a requisite for a more positive and welcoming approach by the multilateral environmental entities towards further collaboration with the ECO Secretariat and region as a whole.

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# DRAFT CALENDAR OF EVENTS FOR 2024

## ENERGY

***ECO Events***

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **No** | **Event/Activity** | **Venue** | **Date** |
|  | 5th ECO Experts Group Meeting on Renewable Energy Sources (EGRES) | Turkmenistan | Second quarter of 2024 |
|  | 2nd Experts Group Meeting on establishment of the ECO Regional Electricity Market (ECO-REM) | Tajikistan | 2024  |
|  | 2nd Meeting of the ECO Public and Private Sector Energy/Petrochemical Consortium/Companies – ECO Refinery Association | Iran | 2024 |
|  | 4th Iran-Türkiye Bilateral Meeting on establishment of the ECO Regional Electricity Market (ECO-REM) | Tbd | 2024 |
|  | 5th ECO Ministerial Meeting on Energy | Uzbekistan | 2024 |
|  | 5th High-Level Experts Group Meeting on Energy (back-to back with the Ministerial Meeting on Energy) | Uzbekistan | 2024 |

***Conferences/Seminars/Workshops/Training Courses***

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **No** | **Event/Activity** | **Venue** | **Date** |
|  | *Upon the volunteer Member States* |  |   |

***Non-ECO Events***

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **No** | **Event/Activity** | **Venue** | **Date** |
|  | 35th Meeting of the Energy Charter Conference |  | 2024 |
|  | 7th Steering Committee Meeting of the Global Network of Sustainable Energy Centres (GN-SEC) Platform | Baku, Azerbaijan | 2024 |
| 3. | 23rd CAREC Ministerial Conference |  | 2024 |  |
| 4. | 13th Meeting of the UNESCAP Expert Working Group on Energy Connectivity |  | 2024 |  |

## MINERALS

***ECO Events***

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **No** | **Event/Activity** | **Venue** | **Date** |
|  | 9th ECO Minerals Experts Group Meeting  | Islamabad | 2024 |
|  | 4th ECO Geomatics Committee | Tehran  | 2024 |
|  | 3rd Meeting of ECO Heads of Surveying and Mapping Organizations | Tehran  | 2024 |

***Conferences/Seminars/Workshops/Training Courses***

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **No** | **Event/Activity** | **Venue** | **Date** |
|  | *Upon the volunteer Member States* |  |  |

## ENVIRONMENT

***ECO Events***

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **No** | **Event/Activity** | **Venue** | **Date** |
| 1. | 6th ECO Ministerial Meeting on Environment |  | 2024 |
| 2. | 7/8th Working Group Meeting on Environment |  | 2024 |
| 3. | High-Level Dialogue Platform on Environmental Cooperation |  | 2024 |
|  |  |  |  |
|  |  |  |  |

***Non-ECO Events***

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| No | Event/Activity | Venue | Date |
| 1. | United Nations Climate Change Conference 2024 (UNFCCC COP29) | Europe, tbc | December 2024 |
| 2. | The sixth session of the United Nations Environment Assembly (UNEA-6) | UNEP Headquarters in Nairobi, Kenya | 26 February to 1 March 2024 |
| 3. | The sixteenth session of the Conference of the Parties (COP 16) to the United Nation Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD) | Riyadh, Saudi Arabia | 2 to 13 December 2024 |
| 4. | The 19th session of the UN Forum on Forests  | New-York | May 2024 |