

289th Meeting of the Council of Permanent Representatives (CPR)

Draft Agenda and Annotated Draft Agenda

July 1, 2024
ECO Secretariat, Tehran

Draft Agenda

1. Adoption of Draft Agenda of the 289th CPR Meeting;
2. Adoption of Draft Report of the 288th CPR Meeting;
3. Preparation for the First Meeting of High-Level Committee (HLC) of ECO Deputy Foreign Ministers on ECO Vision 2025 Review;
4. Preparations for the 28th Meeting of the COM, 26th Informal Meeting of the COM in UN HQ, and 16th ECO-ASEAN Joint Ministerial Meeting;
5. Approval of ECO Work Programme 2024;
6. Appointment of the new ECO Deputy Secretary General (TC & HRSD);
7. Administrative and budgetary matters:
 - Reallocation of ECO Budget 2024;
 - Recommendations of the Selection Panel.
8. Any other business;
9. Date of the next CPR Meeting.

Annotated Draft Agenda

Agenda Item No. 1

Adoption of the Agenda

1. The Secretariat proposes the following Draft Agenda for adoption:
 - Adoption of Draft Agenda of the 289th CPR Meeting;
 - Adoption of Draft Report of the 288th CPR Meeting;
 - Preparation for the First Meeting of High-Level Committee (HLC) of ECO Deputy Foreign Ministers on ECO Vision 2025 Review;
 - Preparations for the 28th Meeting of the COM, 26th Informal Meeting of the COM in UN HQ, and 16th ECO-ASEAN Ministerial Meeting;
 - Approval of ECO Work Programme 2024;
 - Appointment of the new ECO Deputy Secretary General (TC & HRSD);
 - Administrative and budgetary matters:
 - Reallocation of ECO Budget 2024;
 - Recommendations of the Selection Panel.
 - Any other business;
 - Date of the next CPR Meeting.

2. The Council may consider the above Draft Agenda for adoption.

Agenda Item No. 2

Adoption of Draft Report of the 288th CPR Meeting

3. The Draft Report of the 288th CPR Meeting held on June 5, 2024 in ECO Secretariat in Tehran was circulated amongst the Member States vide Secretariat's Note Verbale No. CFU/2024/769 dated June 10, 2024.
4. The Embassy of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan in Tehran shared the views/comments regarding the Draft Report of 288th CPR Meeting which were also circulated among the Member States via Secretariat's Note Verbale No. CFU/2024/772 dated June 12, 2024.
5. The Council may consider the adoption of the Draft Report with the proposed views/comments by the Islamic Republic of Pakistan.

Agenda Item No. 3

Preparation for the First Meeting of High-Level Committee (HLC) of ECO Deputy Foreign Ministers on ECO Vision 2025 Review

6. It should be noted that due to lack of quorum as required by the HLC's Terms of Reference, the First Meeting of HLC of ECO Deputy Foreign Ministers, initially scheduled for May 27-28, 2024 at the ECO Secretariat in Tehran, was postponed.
7. The Council may now consider the new dates for the First HLC Meeting.

8. In addition, the Final Draft Report of the ECO Vision 2025 Review Committee, originally required to be submitted to the HLC, was circulated among the Member States via the Secretariat's Note Verbale No. DSG-JPC/2024/531 dated April 25, 2024. Relevantly, the Council tasked the Review Committee to hold another meeting to finalize the Report, taking into consideration any views or comments received from the Member States within the 10-day period set by the Council in its 288th session.

9. Upon the request of the Embassy of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan, the Fifth Meeting of the ECO Vision Review Committee, scheduled for June 19, 2024, has been rescheduled to be organized soon after the CPR Meeting, which is scheduled for July 1, 2024.

10. The Council will be briefed on the matters to be considered by the Review Committee's Fifth Meeting to ascertain further recommendations for consideration of the next CPR.

Agenda Item No. 4

Preparations for the 28th Meeting of the COM, 26th Informal Meeting of the COM in UN HQ, and 16th ECO-ASEAN Joint Ministerial Meeting

11. The 28th Meeting of the Council of Ministers (COM) is scheduled to be hosted by the Islamic Republic of Iran during December this year in Tehran.

12. Additionally, the 25th Informal Meeting of the COM and the 15th ECO-ASEAN Joint Ministerial Meeting were organized on September 21 and September 22, 2023, during the 78th Session of the UNGA in New York. Taking into account the established practice, the Secretariat proposes to consider the organization of the next meetings of the Informal COM and ECO-ASEAN during the 79th Session of the UNGA in New York this year.

13. As per previous practice, the CPR may establish the Preparatory Committee (PrepCom) to facilitate the preparations and holding of 28th Meeting of the COM, 26th Informal Meeting of the COM and 16th ECO-ASEAN Joint Ministerial Meeting.

Agenda Item No. 5

Approval of ECO Work Programme 2024

14. The Council, in its last session, authorized Pakistan and Türkiye in coordination with the Secretariat, to finalize one of the two paragraphs proposed by Türkiye to be reflected in the ECO Work Program 2024. As of the date of the issuance of this Agenda, the mandated consultations have not been made. However, the Council would be briefed of the outcomes of such consultations which are expected to take place before the Council's meeting.

15. The Council may take necessary decision in light of the outcome of such consultations.

Agenda Item No. 6

Appointment of the new ECO Deputy Secretary General (TC & HRSD)

16. Based on the recommendations of the 287th and 288th Meetings of the CPR held on May 6 and June 5, 2024, the Kyrgyz Republic and Turkmenistan were tasked with entering bilateral consultations, facilitated by the Chair if necessary, to finalize a single candidate for the upcoming vacancy of Deputy Secretary-General (TC&HRSD).

17. The relevant Member States may like to brief the Council of their bilateral consultations, so that the matter for selection of new DSG may be finalized.

Agenda Item No. 7

Administrative and budgetary matters:

- Reallocation of ECO Budget of 2024

18. Based on the conclusions of the 287th and 288th Meetings of CPR, a revised salary table in respect of Category-III Iranian Staff of the Secretariat was circulated among the Member States via Note Verbale No. SG/2024/777 dated June 12, 2024.

19. The Council may consider the said table and take necessary decision.

- Extension of the post of Head of Section for Administration & Management

20. The ECO Secretariat, through its Note Verbale No. ADMN/2024/685 dated May 27, 2024, announced that the post of Head of Section for Administration & Management (Category-I, D1) will become vacant upon the completion of Mr. Mojtaba Ramezani Ahmadabadi's (Iranian National) service tenure on July 10, 2024.

21. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Islamic Republic of Iran, via its Note Verbale, informed the Secretariat that the internal process to select a successor for Mr. Mojtaba Ramezani Ahmadabadi (Head of Section for Administration & Management) is underway. The Ministry, therefore, requested the Secretariat to take the necessary measures to extend his tenure until his successor assumes the position. This communication was also circulated among the Member States via the Secretariat's Note Verbale No. ADMN/2024/778 dated June 12, 2024.

22. During the 288th CPR Meeting held on June 5, 2024, the Council considered the matter. It was noted that the Head of Section for Administration may remain in his position until his replacement joins. The necessary formalities will be completed according to ECO rules and procedures, and a decision will be made even without a two-week pre-notice. It was emphasized that all actions will adhere to the established rules and procedures. The Chair noted that there was no objection to this extension, and the formalities will be completed accordingly.

23. The Embassy of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan in Tehran via its Note Verbale No. ECO-7/3/2024-B/21/320 dated June 10, 2024 requested to include this matter in the Agenda of 289th CPR Meeting that was circulated among the Member States via Secretariat's Note Verbale No. ADMN/2024/781 dated June 13, 2024.

- Recommendations of the Selection Panel

Agenda Item No.8

Any other business

24. Under this Agenda Item, the Council may discuss any other relevant issues, if raised.

Agenda Item No. 9

Date of the next CPR Meeting

25. The Council may decide the date of its next (290th) Meeting in consultation with the Member States and the ECO Secretariat.



Economic Cooperation Organization

ECO

No: CFU/2024/769

Priority: Most Urgent

Date: 10/6/2024

Attachment: Yes

The Secretariat of the Economic Cooperation Organization (ECO) presents its compliments to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Islamic Republic of Iran and the Embassies of ECO Member States in Tehran and has the honour to enclose herewith the **Draft Report of 288th Council of Permanent Representatives (CPR) Meeting held on June 5, 2024 at the ECO Secretariat in Tehran.**

The Secretariat avails itself of this opportunity to renew to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Islamic Republic of Iran and the Embassies of ECO Member States in Tehran the assurances of its highest consideration.

All ECO Member States - Tehran



288th Meeting of the Council of Permanent Representatives (CPR)

Draft Report

June 5, 2024
ECO Secretariat, Tehran

Draft Report

Under the chairmanship of the Islamic Republic of Iran, the 288th CPR Meeting, held on June 5, 2025, was attended by the Permanent Representatives/Representatives Republic of Azerbaijan, Islamic Republic of Iran, Republic of Kazakhstan, Kyrgyz Republic, Islamic Republic of Pakistan, Republic of Tajikistan, Republic of Türkiye and Turkmenistan. The ECO Secretary General and the relevant Staff of the Secretariat also attended the Meeting. List of participants is enclosed as Annexure-I.

2. The Meeting commenced with sincere condolences from distinguished Members of the Council and the ECO Secretary General for the tragic loss of Iranian President H.E. Mr. Ebrahim Raisi and Foreign Minister H.E. Dr. Hossein Amir-Abdollahian, who perished in a recent helicopter crash. The Council acknowledged President Raisi and Foreign Minister Amir-Abdollahian as visionary leaders committed to Iran's progress and prosperity. In solidarity with the government and people of Iran, the Council observed a one-minute silence in their honor, recognizing their legacies as inspirations for continued regional cooperation and economic advancement.

3. The distinguished Members of the Council and the ECO Secretary General also expressed their heartfelt condolences to the Representative of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan, Ms. Khirat, on the recent passing of her father. They acknowledged her loss with deep sympathy and extended their support during this difficult time.

4. The **Chair** and the Permanent Representative of the Islamic Republic of **Iran** expressed heartfelt gratitude to the Council for their thoughtful condolences regarding the recent tragic incident that claimed the lives of Iran's high-ranking and esteemed leaders. He especially thanked to Pakistan and Türkiye for the observance of public mourning by their respective nations. He requested the participating delegates to convey, on behalf of his government and delegation, their sincere gratitude to their leadership for the sympathy and thoughtfulness towards Iran and its leadership.

5. The Representative of the Islamic Republic of **Pakistan** also acknowledged with deep gratitude the sympathetic words expressed by the distinguished Members of the Council concerning the recent demise of her father.

6. Besides, the **Council** warmly welcomed the new Ambassador of the Republic of Kazakhstan, H.E. Mr. Ontalap Onalbayev, as the country's Permanent Representative to ECO, expressing confidence that his extensive experience and expertise would significantly enhance the Council's deliberations and proceedings. The Council looked forward to his valuable contributions in fostering regional cooperation and advancing the goals of ECO.

7. The Permanent Representative of the Republic of **Kazakhstan** thanked the eminent Members of the Council for their warm welcome to him. He emphasized Kazakhstan's commitment to the ECO, highlighting his previous experience at the Embassy in Tehran and the importance of the ECO in current geopolitical and economic contexts. He reaffirmed Kazakhstan's dedication to enhancing trade and economic relations within the ECO, supported by active participation in regional summits and fulfilling financial obligations, expressing confidence in the collective efforts to implement regional initiatives and strengthen the ECO's well-being.

Agenda Item No. 1

Adoption of the Agenda

8. Due to the lack of quorum, the First Meeting of the High-Level Committee (HLC) of the ECO Deputy Foreign Ministers was postponed. Consequently, the Council agreed to re-title item 3 of the agenda to "*Report of the ECO Vision 2025 Review Committee*" and adopted the revised agenda accordingly.

- Adoption of Draft Agenda of the 288th CPR Meeting;
- Adoption of Draft Report of the 287th CPR Meeting;
- Report of the ECO Vision 2025 Review Committee
- Approval of ECO Work Programme 2024;
- Inclusion of Agriculture Section into Framework of Cooperation between ECO and ASEAN;
- Establishment of a Working Group on Joint Trade Zones (JTZs) in the ECO region;
- Participation at the International Tourism Symposium and Expo;
- Extension of invitation to Afghanistan to participate at ECOTA Meeting;
- Participation at the Third Ministerial Meeting of the Trade Preferential System among the Member States of the OIC Trade Negotiations Committee;
- Appointment of the new ECO Deputy Secretary General (TC & HRSD);
- Administrative and budgetary matters:
 - Reallocation of ECO Budget of 2024;
 - Consideration of possibility of Reallocation of funds in condition of being adequate cash at the end of the year between the Chapters of ECO budget 2024 without creation of increase in the total size of budget for Medical Reimbursement;
 - Recommendations of the Selection Panel.
- Any other business;
- Date of the next CPR Meeting.

Agenda Item No. 2

Adoption of Draft Report of the 287th CPR Meeting

9. The **Council** adopted the Draft Report of the 287th CPR Meeting held on May 6, 2024 at the ECO Secretariat, and circulated amongst the Member States vide Note Verbale No. CFU/2024/630 dated May 13, 2024.

Agenda Item No. 3

Report of the ECO Vision 2025 Review Committee

10. The **ECO Economic Advisor** provided an overview from the draft report of ECO Vision 2025 Review Committee. He highlighted that the 13th ECO Summit in Islamabad in March 2017 adopted the ECO Vision 2025, outlining a strategic roadmap for sustainable economic growth. A mid-term review conducted in 2021 assessed progress towards these goals. Following declarations from the 27th ECO Council of Ministers and ECO Council of Permanent Representatives meetings, the ECO Vision 2025 Review Committee was established to evaluate progress under this framework. From April to

May 2024, the committee, chaired by Mr. Behzad Azarsa, Senior Expert, Multilateral & International Economic Cooperation, Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Islamic Republic of Iran, assessed activities since 2021, focusing on refining project priorities and enhancing regional connectivity and cooperation.

11. The **ECO Economic Advisor** added that the committee recommended extending or renewing the Vision post-2025 to sustain momentum and address new challenges for regional integration and sustainable development. The report, based on evaluations conducted from 2021 onwards and aligned with insights from the mid-term review, emphasized optimizing priorities and ensuring effective project execution. It identified areas for improvement and refined strategies to better achieve Vision objectives. Recommendations included submitting a document outlining priority projects for approval by the CPR and COM, following circulation of the comprehensive report among member states.

12. The **Chair** and the Permanent Representative of the Islamic Republic of **Iran** expressed gratitude for the comprehensive briefing by Economic Advisor on the draft report of the ECO Vision 2025 Review Committee. He appreciated the informative nature of the presentation. He invited the participants to share their comments on the report.

13. Regarding the Vision Review Committee Meeting Report, the Representative of the Republic of **Türkiye** mentioned ongoing process in Ankara on the Vision 2025 document, noting its detailed nature and the current review by Turkish authorities. He requested additional time to finalize their views and recommendations in this regard. Concerning the rescheduling of the High Level Committee of Deputy Foreign Ministers, he indicated that he did not yet receive instructions from Ankara and requested deferral of the case, accordingly.

14. The **Chair** and the Permanent Representative of the Islamic Republic of **Iran** recalled that the Vision Committee's report was supposed to be submitted to the Deputy Foreign Ministers' meeting, which was postponed due to a lack of quorum. Stressing the importance of advancing the process independently of the meeting's schedule, he confirmed the draft report had been circulated among member states and requested feedback from them. To expedite the report's finalization, he proposed a 10-day feedback period, followed by collaboration between the Secretariat and Chair to integrate inputs into a consolidated document. Additionally, he suggested reconvening the Vision Review Committee, potentially at the ambassadorial level, to ensure the report's completion and distribution. Simultaneously, preparations for the Deputy Foreign Ministers' meeting would continue. The Chair concluded by noting unanimous support and expressed gratitude for contributions to the Vision 2025 review process on behalf of the Chairmanship and CPR.

15. The **ECO Secretary General** proposed using the agenda item to discuss and decide on new dates for the First Meeting of the High-Level Committee (HLC), or at least to exchange views on this matter. Stressing the importance of maximizing participation from Deputy Foreign Ministers, he suggested hearing from each member state on their preferred dates for convening the meeting in Tehran. He noted that the first week of August would be suitable for him, as his tenure concludes on August 12, 2024. He emphasized the need for prompt scheduling and, if necessary, suggested

considering the availability of the next Secretary General in case the HLC Meeting cannot be scheduled before his tenure ends.

16. The Representative of **Pakistan** emphasized the need to coordinate with the offices of the Deputy Foreign Ministers for scheduling the HLC Meeting. She expressed agreement with the Secretary General's proposal and suggested promptly working on securing suitable dates or a range of dates in this regard.

17. The Permanent Representative of **Azerbaijani** proposed coordinating with the host country to finalize official dates and promptly informing the Honourable ECO Deputy Ministers. He suggested considering one or two alternative dates to seek confirmation on participation of the Deputy Foreign Ministers in the meeting.

18. The Permanent Representative of **Tajikistan** suggested that dates for the HLC Meeting be presented for all countries to consider collectively. He noted the possibility of differences if each country chooses its own dates, proposing instead that the Secretary and Chair offer one or two dates for unified consideration by the Member States.

19. The Permanent Representative of **Kazakhstan** expressed support for the Secretary General's proposal as more acceptable. He underscored the need of coordinating and obtaining approval for the proposed date from the authorities in Kazakhstan, requesting formal communication from the ECO Secretariat on this issue.

20. The **Chair** and the Permanent Representative of the Islamic Republic of **Iran** concluded that the Secretariat would wait for 10 days to receive feedback from member countries regarding the report of ECO Vision 2025 Review Committee, before scheduling its final meeting. Additionally, the Secretariat would propose one principal date and possibly two alternative dates in a note to facilitate consultation with ECO Capitals. This is to reach an agreement on the date for the rescheduling the first meeting of the High-Level Committee, he said.

Agenda Item No. 4

Approval of ECO Work Programme 2024

21. Regarding ECO Work Programme 2024, the **Chair** and the Permanent Representative of the Islamic Republic of **Iran** noted that the matter was previously discussed, and it appeared that consensus had been reached on a particular proposal put forth by the Republic of Türkiye. However, he noted that there were some further considerations or observations regarding this proposal, inviting the Representative of Republic of Türkiye to elaborate on the current issue.

22. The Representative of the Republic of **Türkiye** expressed conciseness in addressing the matter, noting that they had submitted a note on May 14, 2024 thereby presenting two alternative drafts for consideration. He expressed readiness to read the drafts if requested, or alternatively, provide copies for review. He concluded by stating their willingness to proceed according to the preferred method of the committee.

23. The **Chair** and the Permanent Representative of the Islamic Republic of **Iran** noted that the note containing two alternative proposals was circulated by the

Secretariat on May 1, 2024. He requested the Secretariat to elaborate and clarify the details of these proposals to facilitate the decision-making process. Highlighting that it is now June and the program has not yet been finalized, the Chair underscored the urgency of resolving this matter, given the passage of almost half a year.

24. The **ECO Secretary General** confirmed the receipt of two alternative texts from Türkiye aimed at replacing sections in the draft Work Program 2024. The first option is longer and emphasizes inviting non-ratified member states to ratify the Charter and Additional Protocol, facilitating the Foundation's operational effectiveness in science, technology and innovation for regional economic development. The second option is shorter and focuses on the Council's discussion regarding the ratification issue, he said. The Secretary General offered to read the longer option again if desired, leaving the decision on the Council.

25. The **Chair** and the Permanent Representative of the Islamic Republic of **Iran** asked the preference of the Secretariat regarding these two options. Moreover, he looked forward to the Representative of Pakistan for any feedback in the matter.

26. The Secretariat's preference leans towards the first option, the longer one. However, the final decision rests with the August Council, the **ECO Secretary General** stated.

27. The Representative of the Islamic Republic of **Pakistan** mentioned that they are awaiting inputs from their headquarters on the matter, which will be conveyed in due course.

28. The **Chair** and the Permanent Representative of the Islamic Republic of **Iran** thanked the distinguished colleague from Pakistan and proposed that the matter be handled through consultation between Pakistan's Secretariat and the Republic of Türkiye. They suggested giving them the mandate to agree on one alternative. Once agreed upon, the Secretariat would circulate it for a two-week silence procedure. The Chair noted no objections to this proposal and instructed the Secretariat, Pakistan, and Türkiye to collaborate on a mutually acceptable alternative for the work program phrase, ensuring no substantive changes in content or nature.

Agenda Item No. 5

Inclusion of Agriculture Section into Framework of Cooperation between ECO and ASEAN

29. The **ECO Deputy Secretary General (TI & AI)** highlighted an existing Framework of Cooperation (FoC) between ASEAN and ECO that lacked a crucial component in agriculture. It has been proposed and agreed to include a new section on agriculture. He requested the member states' agreement to finalize this addition through an exchange of letters between distinguished Ministers of Iran and ASEAN, who serve as focal points.

30. The **Chair** and the Permanent Representative of the Islamic Republic of **Iran** stated it appears that authorization is required from the ECO side, whereas ASEAN has already provided their consent.

31. The **ECO Deputy Secretary General (TI & AI)** responded ASEAN has indicated their readiness through a note. Once both sides agree, the two Ministers of Iran and Malaysia, representing as current coordinators of their respective Organizations, will finalize the agreement, he added.

32. The **Chair** and the Permanent Representative of the Islamic Republic of **Iran** noted that one part has been neglected or omitted in the FoC or document. Both sides had already agreed at the secretariat level to include this part on agriculture, he noted, adding that they need authorization from our side to proceed with discussions and finalize it. The Chair suggested that the proposal should then return to the membership of both sides for final approval.

33. The **ECO Secretary General** referred to the Malaysian Embassy's proposal regarding the finalization process that suggests adopting their standard practice used with international partners to incorporate an additional sentence rather than a paragraph. He said that initially proposed paragraphs from secretariat were recommended for deletion by ASEAN's secretariat, with only one sentence remaining. This sentence emphasizes the importance of cooperation between the two organizations in agriculture, he mentioned. The Secretary General confirmed agreement with this approach and ASEAN's proposal to add the sentence as an annex to the framework of cooperation, not the FoC. Pending CPR's agreement, the Secretary General proposed informing ASEAN and initiating an exchange of letters between Malaysian MFA and the MFA of Foreign Affairs of Iran who currently coordinate ASEAN and ECO respectively. This procedure was endorsed by ASEAN, he stated.

34. The **Council** found no objection to the proposal and authorized the Secretariat to continue discussions with the ASEAN to agree on this new area of cooperation as an annex to the previously agreed document, through the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Iran and the MFA of Malaysia Embassy in Tehran.

Agenda Item No. 6

Establishment of a Working Group on Joint Trade Zones (JTZs) in the ECO region

35. The **ECO Economic Advisor** reported on the ECO team's visit to the Sarakhs-Sarakhs and Incheh Borun-Altyn Asyr border checkpoints between Turkmenistan and Iran, from May 7 to 10, 2024. He said that the purpose of their visit was to explore Turkmenistan's proposal for establishing Joint Trade Zones with Iran, evaluating its potential impact, resource requirements and formulating recommendations. Discussions included updates on Turkmenistan's similar project with Uzbekistan and Iran's existing Special Economic Zone in Sarakhs, which focuses on streamlining business processes. The ECO team stressed aligning project documents with ECO's strategic goals and promoting economic, trade and transport cooperation among member states. They highlighted the establishment of joint trade zones as pivotal for boosting inter-regional trade.

36. The **ECO Economic Advisor** proposed forming a Working Group comprising representatives from foreign affairs, trade, transportation agencies, customs and other relevant ministries to finalize concepts and terms of reference for feasibility studies and legal frameworks. Additionally, he suggested involving financial institutions to secure

necessary resources. Future visits to other regions were also proposed to further similar initiatives.

37. The **Chair** and the Permanent Representative of the Islamic Republic of **Iran** expressed appreciation for the proposal and emphasized the importance of developing two framework documents for an additional protocol on trade and customs tariffs. He welcomed the initiative, foreseeing its utility in establishing Joint Trade Zones among member states. Following a presentation, he sought clarification on whether the proposed working group for Joint Trade Zones would be ad-hoc or permanent.

38. The Permanent Representative of the Republic of **Tajikistan** proposed establishing a working group specifically tasked with implementing the border checkpoint visits agreed upon by the Council. He emphasized that the field visit to Turkmenistan and Iran's border checkpoints, as highlighted by the Economic Advisor, could serve as a model for similar visits to other member states' borders. Additionally, he expressed gratitude for the work done and suggested including permanent representatives in future visits to border checkpoints to better understand their capacities and potential.

39. The **Chair** and the Permanent Representative of the Islamic Republic of **Iran** agreed with the proposal made by his Tajik counterpart to include the permanent representatives in the ECO delegation during such visits. He suggested establishing a working group to develop the two documents mentioned. Once finalized, these documents would be circulated among member states, ensuring thorough recognition and updates for the working group. He received no objections to establishing the working group to focus on the mandates outlined in the agenda. Additionally, he supported inviting government representatives and interested parties to join visits to other border crossing points, emphasizing inclusivity and relevance.

40. Recognizing the importance of this initiative, the **Council** approved the establishment of the proposed Working Group to finalize the concept and ToR for the feasibility study and to develop the necessary legal frameworks for Joint Trade Zones (JTZs).

Agenda Item No. 7

Participation at the International Tourism Symposium and EXPO

41. The **ECO Director for Tourism** briefed that the Secretariat received an invitation from the Pakistan Tourism Development Corporation to attend the International Tourism Symposium and Expo in Islamabad on June 10-11, 2024. The event will feature panel discussions on topics including green investment in tourism, connectivity improvement, conservation of cultural and natural heritage, Pakistan's tourism perception, innovation in tourism education and presentations on tourism investment opportunities, as well as B2B meetings.

42. The **ECO Director for Tourism** further stated that the symposium aims to gather tourism experts from regional and international organizations such as UN Tourism, Shanghai Cooperation Organization, World Bank and member states to discuss Pakistan's tourism sector. PTDC has offered to cover accommodation for three nights and internal transportation for one ECO delegate. The Secretariat views this as an

opportunity to assess tourism cooperation among member states and support regional tourism development. Approval from CPR is sought for Secretariat's participation, as the Symposium is not listed in the 2024 calendar of events.

43. The **Chair** and the Permanent Representative of the Islamic Republic of **Iran** reminded that there has been an ongoing effort to propose and adopt Lahore as the ECO Tourism Capital for 2027. This initiative aims to involve ECO in various tourism projects in Pakistan. The Chair strongly recommended that the House approve the participation of the ECO in the International Tourism Symposium and Expo to pave the way for more events in Pakistan.

44. Considering that the event's objective is in alignment with ECO's tourism development agenda, the **Council** approved the Secretariat's participation in the International Tourism Symposium and Expo in Islamabad, Pakistan, on June 10-11, 2024.

Agenda Item No. 8

Extension of Invitation to Afghanistan to participate at ECOTA Meeting

45. The **Chair** and the Permanent Representative of the Islamic Republic of **Iran** recalled a previous decision allowing Afghanistan to participate in activities if their technical contribution is necessary. This aligns with our earlier decision reported to the CPR, which agreed that Afghanistan's participation should be determined on a case-by-case basis by the CPR, focusing on technical contribution and satisfaction. With the issue under discussion, we seek authorization for the Secretariat to invite Afghanistan to join the ECOTA Cooperation Council Meeting.

46. The Permanent Representative of the Republic of **Tajikistan** noted that during a previous CPR session, the possibility of Afghanistan's participation in technical meetings was discussed. However, the current proposal concerns Afghanistan's participation in the ECOTA Cooperation Council, which involves the ministers of economics of member states. Therefore, Tajikistan, at this time, is not prepared to support Afghanistan's participation in this meeting.

47. The Representative of the Islamic Republic of **Pakistan** emphasized that the discussion on ECOTA does not entail inviting Afghan ministers. She said that the focus of invitations may be limited to involving technical personnel from the relevant ministries. The intention is to include Afghan technical experts in meetings where their participation is deemed necessary, avoiding broader political implications and focusing solely on specific agenda items where their expertise could contribute, she underscored.

48. Reflecting on Pakistan side's proposal, the **Chair** and the Permanent Representative of the Islamic Republic of **Iran** asked the convenience of Tajikistan towards limiting the Afghanistan's participation to specific segments of the meeting.

49. The Permanent Representative of the Republic of **Tajikistan** reiterated the need to consult with their capital on this matter, emphasizing that they currently lack specific instructions in this regard.

50. The Representative of the Islamic Republic of **Pakistan** expressed their intention to schedule the meeting at the earliest convenience, contingent upon confirmation of participation from the contracting parties.

51. The **ECO Deputy Secretary General (TI & AI)** clarified that ECOTA operates with its own parties and decision-making mechanisms, akin to ECO's general approach. Member states were inclined to align with ECO's meeting protocols but sought guidance from the Council on similar decisions. Reflecting on Tajikistan's stance and Pakistan's suggestion for Afghanistan's participation in technical meetings, he acknowledged the UN's treatment of Afghanistan and proposed granting them participation without decision-making authority due to ECOTA's current fragile state. This approach aims to allow Afghanistan to contribute actively as an observer, facilitating discussion while preserving decision-making among ECOTA's existing parties.

52. The Representative of the Islamic Republic of **Pakistan** suggested that Afghanistan's participation in ECOTA discussions be limited to non-decision-making roles. She proposed two options: first, authorizing the Secretary General to conduct technical consultations with Afghanistan, including seeking views from their Ministers, ensuring their virtual presence during meetings in Pakistan for presentation and observation. Second, engaging in virtual consultations on specific ECOTA issues, allowing Afghanistan to contribute as an observer. These options aim to clarify Afghanistan's position and facilitate their involvement in ECOTA discussions.

53. With regard to the participation of Afghanistan in the next meeting of the ECOTA Cooperation Council, it was concluded that the views of contracting parties will be obtained before scheduling the date of the said meeting, through a formal communication by ECO Secretariat.

Agenda Item No. 9

Participation at the Third Ministerial Meeting of the Trade Preferential System among the Member States of the OIC Trade Negotiations Committee

54. The **ECO Deputy Secretary General (TI & AI)** briefed that the distinguished Minister of Trade of Türkiye extended an invitation to the Secretary General to attend the third ministerial meeting on the preferential trade system of the OIC. Due to a scheduling conflict with another engagement of the Secretary General, the proposal is to authorize the participation of a relevant director and expert from the ECO Secretariat. This decision is based on the shared membership of ECO and OIC, ensuring that discussions on the preferential trading system, including expansion and capacity building, are relevant for ECO colleagues to contribute and gain insights. Additionally, given ECO's own preferential trading system, this meeting offers an opportunity for mutual exchange of information and perspectives on trade facilitation issues. The participation of ECO is thus deemed beneficial both for contribution and learning purposes.

55. The **Chair** and the Permanent Representative of the Islamic Republic of **Iran** queried whether the ECO is invited to the OIC as an observer?

56. The **ECO Deputy Secretary General (TI & AI)** replied that ECO would participate in the OIC meeting, as observer. The invitation covers participation at both levels, as confirmed by the organizers in Türkiye.

57. The **Council** considered and approved the above proposal of the Secretariat, including the expenditures to be incurred on account of return airfare and DSA for two members of staff.

Agenda Item No. 10

Appointment of the new ECO Deputy Secretary General (TC & HRSD)

58. The **Chair** and the Permanent Representative of the Islamic Republic of **Iran** recalled that, during the previous meeting, the Council mandated the nominating countries, Turkmenistan and the Kyrgyz Republic, to engage in consultations and reach a mutually agreeable compromise, thereby avoiding any competition for this position. He invited the delegations from Turkmenistan and the Kyrgyz Republic to inform the Council of the outcomes of their consultations.

59. The Permanent Representative of the **Kyrgyz Republic** stated that no bilateral consultations had been held thus far. He requested the Council's recommendations and welcomed any opinions from the delegation of Turkmenistan to advance this matter.

60. The Representative of **Turkmenistan** expressed full support for the initiative and emphasized the need for a proposal or a relevant verbal note from the Secretariat to forward to their authorities for their response. He noted that receiving feedback from the Secretariat would be beneficial and highlighted the necessity of a formal note to facilitate consultations with the Kyrgyz Republic. He also mentioned that consultations with their headquarters would be required and regretted that he could not provide further information at this time.

61. The **Chair** and the Permanent Representative of the Islamic Republic of **Iran** reiterated that the two nominating countries should first engage in consultations as concluded earlier. He noted that there was no need for an additional report, as the discussions from the last meeting had been incorporated and reflected in the finalized report available for dispatch to the respective capitals. He offered an additional ten days for further consultations, if needed.

62. The Representative of the **Kyrgyz Republic** acknowledged the difficult situation and requested additional time, possibly until the next CPR meeting, to hold further consultations. He emphasized that their nomination was in accordance with the established criteria and practice, including the alphabetical order for the positions of Secretary General SG and Deputy Secretary-General. While there is no written formula for the DSG post, the established practice is understood to apply. He cautioned against deviating from this practice, suggesting it might necessitate discussions on a new rotation formula and recommended adhering to the accepted general practice. He requested the Secretary to express his views in the matter.

63. The **ECO Legal Advisor** explained that the appointment against the posts of the Deputy Secretary General is governed by a simple and clear rule stated in Article 6, Paragraph 4, Chapter 3 of the ECO Staff Regulations, which mandates that

appointments are made by the Council of Ministers (COM based on the recommendation of the Council of Permanent Representatives (CPR). He noted that while the job description criteria have been previously circulated, the alphabetical rotation principle mentioned by the Kyrgyz Ambassador applies only to the position of the ECO Secretary General, as outlined in Article 6.1, Paragraph 1. This rotation is not fixed but observed as far as possible. He concluded by recommending the continuation of informal consultations as the best option at this stage.

64. The Permanent Representative of the Republic of **Tajikistan** emphasized the importance of electing a new Deputy Secretary General from among the current nominees. He noted the nominations of H.E. Ambassador Turdakun Sydykov from Kyrgyzstan, recognized for his active ambassadorial role, and H.E. Ambassador Silapberdi Nurberdiyev from Turkmenistan, a highly experienced diplomat. With only one position available, he highlighted the previous agreement to conduct consultations facilitated by the Secretariat to reach consensus between the nominating countries. He proposed that the Chair facilitate these consultations to adhere to the organization's consensus-based decision-making process outlined in the staff rules. He suggested specifying in the decision that the other nominee would have priority in the subsequent election for Deputy Secretary General. Additionally, he extended congratulations to Pakistan on the recent election of their candidate as the next ECO Secretary General. He mentioned Tajikistan's support for Pakistan's nomination conveyed through a Note Verbale to the Secretariat, but to his utter surprise, the same was not circulated due to unknown reasons.

65. The **Chair** and the Permanent Representative of the Islamic Republic of **Iran** acknowledged his Tajik counterpart's proposal regarding the selection of the next Deputy Secretary General. He, however, expressed confusion over his final point due to the note not being circulated and questioned whether there had been a breach in the two-week silence procedure?

66. The **ECO Secretary General** expressed gratitude for Tajikistan's support regarding the appointment of the new Secretary General. He endorsed the proposal presented by him for appointment of Deputy Secretary General, committing to facilitating informal consultations between Turkmenistan and Kyrgyzstan in the matter. Regarding the issue of non-circulation of Note Verbale, he expressed regret that it had not reached member states as intended. He noted that despite his instructions to the administration section responsible for such distributions, he was unaware of the status of such circulation. He considered this omission a serious oversight, emphasizing that a Note Verbale is a significant document that should be promptly circulated to express support among member states. He apologized for the delay and assured that the Note Verbale would be circulated promptly following the CPR meeting.

67. The **ECO Deputy Secretary General (Admn, EME, IR & IT)** sought permission from the ECO Secretary General and the Chair to clarify the confusion.

68. The **ECO Secretary General** denied permission, while the **Chair** allowed Ambassador Bicakli to speak, questioning the need for permission from himself rather than from the Secretary General.

69. The **ECO Secretary General** raised a point of order, emphasizing that according to current rules; all interventions from the Secretariat must receive prior approval from the Secretary General which was also stressed in a recent office note circulated amongst all directing staff. He expressed concern that altering this rule would impose unnecessary pressure and undermine the Secretary General's mandated authority as outlined in the organization's basic charter and rules. This stance, he reaffirmed, as his official position.

70. Regarding the Note Verbale intended to convey a member state's support for another, the **ECO Secretary General** reiterated that although he had promptly forwarded it to the administration department, it was unfortunately not circulated as per instructions. He expressed regret for this act of negligence on behalf of the administration and considered the issue closed. He assured the Council that the Note Verbale would be circulated later in the day and requested that further discussion on this matter be discontinued.

71. The **ECO Deputy Secretary General (Admn, EME, IR & IT)** asserted that there is significant criticism directed at the administration, which he deemed necessary to address. He insisted on having the opportunity to speak and clarify the matter in the presence of His Excellency the Secretary General and the Ambassador of Tajikistan, who raised the concerns. Stressing the administration's right to defend itself transparently, he emphasized the need for clarity and full explanation of the issues at hand in this forum.

72. The **Chair** and the Permanent Representative of the Islamic Republic of **Iran** granted permission to Ambassador Bicakli, stating, "Please proceed. We are listening to you."

73. The **ECO Deputy Secretary General (Admn, EME, IR & IT)** clarified that the Note Verbale mentioned by Ambassador of Tajikistan, purportedly dated May 16th, was actually sent via fax to the Secretariat on May 19, 2024, as evidenced by official records. He explained that during this period, he was on a mission in Turkmenistan, and the Note Verbale drafting commenced in his absence under the Head of Section for Administration. Upon returning to the Secretariat on May, he found the silence procedure for appointing the new Secretary General had already concluded, making the Note Verbale on this issue redundant. Based on Tajikistan's lack of objections during the silence procedure, he inferred their tacit support for the appointment, leading him to deem further circulation of the Note Verbale to member states unnecessary and illogical.

74. The **ECO Secretary General** expressed disappointment with the Chair's decision, feeling it undermined authority of this privileged position, overseeing the ECO's operational and organizational command. He noted there was initial reluctance to allow his subordinate to speak, despite eventually being permitted. He was particularly troubled by the characterization of his instructions as illogical, emphasizing that clear directives are crucial for maintaining order and efficiency within the organization.

75. Regarding a draft Note Verbale prepared by the administration office, the **ECO Secretary General** highlighted its significance in symbolizing positive gestures between member states. However, he expressed concern that this communication was not

circulated after the two-week silence period ended, which he believed was important for maintaining transparency and diplomatic courtesy among member countries. He stressed that instructions issued by the Secretary General are intended for implementation without questioning their rationale, underscoring the importance of procedural adherence to uphold the integrity and smooth functioning of the organization.

76. The **ECO Deputy Secretary General (Admn, EME, IR & IT)** explained that, in his capacity as Deputy Secretary General for Administration, he did not receive any direct instructions from the Secretary General. He emphasized that there were no instructions from the Secretary General visible in his inbox pertaining to administrative matters.

77. The **Chair** and the Permanent Representative of the Islamic Republic of **Iran** elucidated that this is an internal matter that should not be discussed here. I believe you have explained what occurred, the Chair noted, adding that the crucial point is that Pakistan is aware of Tajikistan's endorsement of the new Secretary General's candidacy. This issue arose due to a technical problem where the note was not circulated as intended. There is no intention to assign blame. It is essential for the Secretariat to maintain consistency in its operations, as we observe variations in the speed of note circulation, he mentioned. This internal issue needs to be managed appropriately. It is important that all parties, especially Pakistan, are informed that Tajikistan has formally supported the candidacy, the Chair stated.

78. The Representative of the Islamic Republic of **Pakistan** expressed gratitude for the support received regarding their nomination for Secretary General Position. Emphasizing that this position carries substantial authority defined by the ECO charter and staff regulations developed through consensus among member states, she underscored that the Secretary General's role transcends individual personalities. She urged that the Secretariat's internal issues should not be discussed here, suggesting such matters to be resolved inside the administrative arrangement of the Organization. She highlighted the importance of professionalism within the organization, expressing concern that airing administrative issues could reflect poorly on all involved, given the seniority and experience of the ambassadors present. She emphasized the need to uphold the organization's integrity, stressing that all participants should contribute to a law-abiding and respectful environment. She noted that the Secretary General from Pakistan would also be pleased to know that all here are to uphold a framework of adherence to laws, rather than posing unnecessary challenges to each other.

79. The Permanent Representative of the Republic of **Azerbaijan** highlighted the need to consider alphabetical order for nominations, as suggested by the Ambassador of Tajikistan, while acknowledging the clarity of regulations and modalities for the Secretary General compared to the Deputy Secretary General positions. He proposed addressing this discrepancy for future cases to prevent similar challenges. Additionally, he raised concerns about unresolved issues encountered during the meeting, including those related to the Secretary. He also posed a question about the procedure if consultations fail to result in a renewed nomination, emphasizing the necessity of addressing these gaps in staff regulations for future reference.

80. The **Chair** and the Permanent Representative of the Islamic Republic of **Iran** posed a significant question about the next steps if consensus was not reached between the two nominating countries. He acknowledged the proposal from the Ambassador of Tajikistan to conduct consultations, emphasizing that these should not be limited solely to the two countries involved. He suggested documenting the Council's invitation for the Kyrgyz Republic and Turkmenistan to engage in consultations to agree on a single candidate for the Deputy Secretary General position. He opined that consultations should occur within the capitals of the respective countries rather than in Tehran, where no decision-making authority on this issue exists. He underscored the role of the Chair or Secretary General in facilitating these consultations. The Chair invited further proposals and expressed openness to additional suggestions, aiming to include agreed-upon measures in the meeting's report and hoping for progress by the next Council of Permanent Representatives (CPR) meeting.

81. The Permanent Representative of the Republic of **Kazakhstan** expressed that the issue at hand is quite challenging, noting that their delegation is awaiting further clarification. He suggested involving the Secretary General and the Chair to facilitate coordination between the Kyrgyz and Turkmen delegations, expressing hope for their agreement, along with the assistance of their Tajik counterpart.

82. The Permanent Representative of the **Kyrgyz** Republic expressed satisfaction with the Chair's proposal and aligned with the views put forth by Ambassadors of Tajikistan, Kazakhstan and others. Referring to Azerbaijan's viewpoint, he highlighted the need to address such issues systematically. He reiterated his previous position on the established practice, emphasizing that while there is no written document on the alphabetical order of Deputy Secretaries General, it has been customary as seen with Afghanistan, Azerbaijan and Kazakhstan. He questioned whether there is a need to discuss or establish a new rotation formula or practice if the current one isn't upheld. He stressed the importance of clarity on whether to follow established practice or create new one.

83. The **Chair** and the Permanent Representative of the Islamic Republic of **Iran** acknowledged the complexities surrounding the current selection of Deputy Secretary General, noting persistent disagreement among interested parties regarding a selection formula. However, he suggested leveraging this experience to develop a formula or modality for future DSG selections and proposed placing it on the organization's agenda. Given the limited time remaining and divergent interests among members, he expressed caution about devising agreed-upon criteria at this juncture. The Chair invited further discussion on whether to incorporate these considerations into the report.

84. The **ECO Secretary General** clarified that August 13, 2024 is not the definitive deadline for deciding on the appointment of the new Deputy Secretary General. Expressing optimism for reaching an agreement by that time, he acknowledged that if consensus is not achieved, consultations will need to continue. Consequently, the Deputy Secretary General position will remain vacant until a decision is made, he concluded.

85. The Representative of the Islamic Republic of **Pakistan** proposed referring the issue to the ECO Reform Committee and, if necessary, to the upcoming Deputy Foreign

Ministers (DFMs) meeting for definitive resolution. Emphasizing the importance of addressing future perspectives, particularly with ECO Reforms on the agenda of the next High-Level Committee of DFMs, she suggested parallel negotiations between the concerned parties. This approach aims to prevent similar situations from arising in the future through proactive engagement and discussion.

86. The **Chair** and the Permanent Representative of the Islamic Republic of **Iran** noted consensus amongst delegations to again invite the two nominating countries to conduct consultations aimed at finalizing a single candidate for the upcoming vacancy of the Deputy Secretary General. Should the need arise, the Chair may facilitate these consultations, he added. The outcomes will be presented at the next CPR meeting for further deliberation, with the goal of reaching a decision by August 12, 2024, he concluded.

Agenda Item No. 11

Administrative and budgetary matters:

- Reallocation of ECO Budget of 2024

87. The **ECO Secretary General** informed that, as agreed during the previous session, the Secretariat is actively developing an implementation formula for the new salary scale of Iranian Category-III Staff. This is being crafted to ensure full compliance with local regulations regarding mandatory Social Security deductions for Iranian nationals, while also aligning with all relevant ECO documents, rules and regulations. The Secretary General anticipated the completion of this task within a few days, after which the same will be circulated among ECO Member States for review and feedback. He invited Council members to share any comments or concerns they may have on this matter with the Secretariat.

88. The **Chair** and the Permanent Representative of the Islamic Republic of **Iran** sought clarification: "Is this the new proposal?"

89. The **ECO Secretary General** reiterated that the Secretariat is currently developing an implementation scheme for the new salary scales initiated by the Iranian Ministry of Foreign Affairs for Iranian Category-III Staff. The scheme aims to ensure compliance with mandatory local Social Security deductions for Iranian nationals as required by local regulations, while also aligning with relevant ECO documents, rules and regulations approved by the organization.

90. The **Chair** and the Permanent Representative of the Islamic Republic of **Iran** queried, "who gave you this mandate?" emphasizing that this is the decision of the Council of Ministers. This not a DSG that you can prevent.

91. The **ECO Secretary General** emphasized the imperative of adhering to both mandatory local Social Security deductions for Iranian nationals, as proposed by the Iranian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and the organization's rules and regulations. Stressing the role of Secretary General as the Chief Administrative Officer, he categorically mentioned his implementation mandate on the decision (s) in line with Article 30.2, Chapter IX of the ECO Staff Regulations as per date designated by the COM. Stressing the Secretary General's responsibility to implement decisions made by

the Council of Ministers within specified timeline or otherwise, he underscored his commitment to upholding the Treaty of Izmir and relevant regulations without the need for additional mandates. He expressed concern over significant oversights and ambiguous citation of local rules by the Working Group, without any particular reference to their relevancy to International Organizations, and its failure to adhere to ECO's established protocols in the proposed salary structure, emphasizing the importance of maintaining organizational integrity.

92. The **Chair** and the Permanent Representative of the Islamic Republic of **Iran** emphasized the current situation involving the decision made by the Council of Ministers, stating that it is now your mandate to implement it. He underscored that the deadline for implementation is set for the end of June, with a specific offer for consultation with the host country to ensure proper execution. He clarified that this is no longer merely an Iranian proposal but a decision endorsed by the Council of Ministers. He emphasized that ECO is an organization composed of ten sovereign states, not a company, and therefore, its highest authority is the Council of Ministers, not an individual acting as a CEO. The Chair highlighted that the Council's decision cannot be challenged based on alleged misleading of the Ministers, noting that this contradicts previous assertions requiring centralized permission.

93. The **Chair** and the Permanent Representative of the Islamic Republic of **Iran** reiterated that the decision was agreed upon through a two-week silence procedure and should have been implemented immediately thereafter. Although additional time was requested and subsequently granted until June 30 during the last CPR meeting, the Chair made it clear that the decision must be executed without further delay. He asserted that there is no alternative scheme to consider; the decision has already been made and must be followed. He also pointed out that the current Secretary General will soon be leaving, and any deviations from implementation, such as extra payments or lack of adherence to the decision, would lead to accountability issues. The new Secretary General should not have to start his tenure dealing with the consequences of non-implementation or parallel challenges. He stressed the importance of adhering to the Council of Ministers' decision, which incorporates the Iranian proposal and has been formally endorsed, adding that the mandate is clear and the implementation must proceed as directed.

94. The Representative of the Islamic Republic of **Pakistan** underlined that the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Pakistan had supported the Iranian proposal in good faith. She recalled that Pakistan Embassy's Note Verbale of March 19, 2024 remains unanswered as yet. She emphasized the need to adhere strictly to the ECO Charter and Staff Regulations, specifically citing Article 31 and Article 23, which require Council of Ministers' approval for any amendments to the regulations, proposed either by a Member States or ECO Secretary General, upon the recommendation of the CPR. She noted that the proposal from Iran had unresolved issues and calculations, particularly concerning the budget, which is prepared and paid in dollars, highlighting the significant disparity between the local currency exchange rate in the open market and the bank rate. She stressed the need for a calculation that satisfies all Member States.

95. In addition, the Representative of the Islamic Republic of **Pakistan** pointed out that the matter is currently in the local court, which changes the context since the Council of Ministers' decision was made before the court's involvement. She questioned

the legal implications of this situation, referencing that in Pakistan, court cases typically halt implementation unless instructed otherwise by the court. She requested clarity on two points: the unanswered queries requested by Pakistan through Embassy's Note Verbale of March 19, and the Secretariat's future course of action given the ongoing court case. She expressed concern about any additional financial liability for the incoming Secretary General.

96. The **Chair** and the Permanent Representative of the Islamic Republic of **Iran** asked the Representative of Pakistan if she had any doubt that this was a COM decision.

97. The Representative of the Islamic Republic of **Pakistan** acknowledged that there is a decision by the Council of Ministers with which they agree in principle. She clarified that there is not opposition to the proposed amendment or recommendation, but there are specific requirements that need to be addressed according to existing ECO staff regulations. She requested further elaboration to relay this information accurately to her Capital, emphasizing that this matter is not about an individual perspective but about the legal position, especially considering the issue is currently in court.

98. The **ECO Secretary General** began by expressing regret over being interrupted by the Chair, and emphasized his role as the chief administrative officer of the organization, as stated in Article 9 of the ECO Regulations. He reiterated his responsibility and answerability to the Council of Ministers for all organizational activities, asserting the importance of allowing him to voice his concerns regarding the implementation of decisions. Concerning the issue of salary payments, he clarified that despite the report suggesting local currency payments to Category-III Iranian Staff, the Secretariat would continue to make payments in USD to maintain transparency and avoid budgetary complications from exchange rate conversions, in line with Article 11 of the Treaty of Izmir. He highlighted discrepancies in the salary structure format presented in the working group report, noting that it followed a local company format. He insisted on revising the table to include necessary columns for child allowance, increment, conveyance allowance and house allowance, while omitting columns for overtime and other legal payments.

99. The **ECO Secretary General** pointed out the omission of increments in the report, emphasizing that increments are the staff's acquired right that they earn in years, and should remain intact and be included in their salaries separately from other payments. He also emphasized for correcting errors in the insurance premiums column, stressing the need for accurate calculations based on gross salary to comply with social security regulations. He cited Chapter 4, Article 11 of the staff regulations, which allows for periodic review of staff's salary scales upon the recommendation of the Secretary General, a step overlooked during the decision-making process. He expressed concern that disregarding the authority of the Secretary General enshrined in the founding documents and regulations would harm the organization's integrity and future operations.

100. The **ECO Secretary General** noted that the working group's report, which aimed to comply with social security regulations, unfairly proposed the reduction in the staff salaries without any justification. He stressed that this creates discrimination based on nationality, as staff in Category-III performing the same job would receive different

salaries. He reiterated the need for a fair implementation of decisions. He reminded the Council of the decision made at the 25th COM meeting in November 2021, which approved salary increases for all Secretariat staff, including category-III Iranian staff. If the question is to anyhow implement the decision, he emphasized that this decision remains in force and should also be implemented to avoid future embarrassment and double standards. Finally, he reassured the Council that the Secretariat is developing a recommendation that aligns with internal and local regulations, particularly addressing the concerns of one-member state regarding the alignment between social security and salary amounts. He requested the Council to honour the unanimously agreed regulations and ensure their observance in letter and spirit, without satisfying the personal pleasure or displeasure of anyone.

101. The Permanent Representative of the Republic of **Tajikistan** expressed gratitude and acknowledged the translators' exhaustion, requesting them to ensure precise translation of his remarks. He reminded everyone of their collective involvement in the initial discussions on the issue at hand.

102. The Permanent Representative of the Republic of **Tajikistan** reiterated the Secretary General's statement regarding the Council of Ministers' decision, highlighting the Secretariat's ongoing efforts to devise a new salary scheme for Iranian nationals in Category-II. He emphasized the importance of aligning with both local social security requirements and internal ECO legal documents, which are stipulated in the organization's staff regulations. While acknowledging the Chair's authorization for new discussions, he underscored the necessity of adhering to internal procedures and the host country's social security requirements. He stressed the need to strike a balance between these factors to ensure the Secretariat can develop a logical and equitable salary scale. This scale should consider the interests and regulations of Iran, as well as those of the organization, he added.

103. Expressing disappointment at the recent tensions, the Permanent Representative of the Republic of **Tajikistan** highlighted his six years of experience of working with CPR, lamenting that he had never witnessed such a disrespectful attitude towards the Secretary General by his subordinates DSGs. He proposed concluding current discussions without further delay, with the understanding that a special commission would address any lingering issues. He stressed the significance of devising a scheme that Iranian authorities find acceptable and that aligns with organizational regulations, emphasizing the need for respectful dialogue throughout the process.

104. The **Chair** and the Permanent Representative of the Islamic Republic of **Iran** emphasized the Council of Ministers' decision, stating, "The decision by the Council of Ministers is the decision by the Council of Ministers. We must adhere strictly to it. Can someone read it aloud, he requested?"

105. The **ECO Legal Advisor** read out a Note Verbale dated April 8, 2024, whereby the ECO Secretariat informed the member states about the approval of the 286th meeting of the Council of Permanent Representatives, held on April 8, 2024. This approval endorsed the recommendation from the second working group meeting on ECO reforms, held on March 17, 2024, concerning the Iranian proposal. These measures are intended to seek approval from the ECO Council of Ministers for amending the staff regulations and revising the salary structure for Iranian Category-III Staff categories.

According to the Note Verbale, unless objections arise, the amendment to the ECO staff regulations will proceed as adopted.

106. The **Chair** and the Permanent Representative of the Islamic Republic of **Iran** also referred to a decision of 287th Meeting of CPR, and read out the relevant para of its report regarding the subject issue that states: *“after careful consideration of the discussions, the Council authorized the Secretariat to reallocate the necessary chapters of the budget 2024 needed for implementation of the decision on approval of Iran's proposed amendments to the staff regulations, including the revised salary structure in respect of Iranian Category-III. The Council also tasked the Secretariat to conduct consultations and coordination with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Iran, if required, to ensure implementation of the Council of Ministers' decision not later than 30 June 2024.*

107. The **Chair** and the Permanent Representative of the Islamic Republic of **Iran** made it clear that there is no room for interpretation on this matter. He affirmed that there was no dispute regarding the Secretary General's authority, emphasizing that the decision in question was mandated by the Council of Ministers. He stressed that the Secretariat cannot propose an alternative to the Council's decision. With the end of June approaching, the Chair noted the Secretary General's indication of developing a new proposal, which would necessitate another approval from the Council of Ministers. He underscored the validity of the Council's decision and emphasized the imperative of its implementation. Addressing the situation, he suggested that any further discussions or alternative proposals should be coordinated with the host country but reiterated that implementation of the COM decision must commence by the end of June. The Chair urged for simplicity in handling the matter, highlighting that the decision and the extension of its implementation deadline from April to the end of June were clearly communicated previously. As of June 5th, he noted again the ongoing development of new initiatives.

108. The **ECO Secretary General** requested the Chair not to interrupt him, emphasizing the Secretariat's readiness to commence implementation of the Council of Ministers' decision effective July 1, 2024. He pointed out significant omissions and inaccuracies in the current proposal, highlighting discrepancies in the table structure compared to the Secretariat's standard format. He clarified that the decision was based on an informational report from the second working group rather than a finalized recommendation or draft decision. Reflecting on previous decisions, he recalled the unanimous approval during the 25th Council of Permanent Representatives (CPR) in Ashgabat for salary increase across all ECO staff categories, including Category-III. Expressing concern over recent shifts in approach, he questioned the consistency in organizational decisions. Despite the intent to align social security contributions with the salaries of Category-III Iranian nationals, he stressed the importance of maintaining uniformity across the Secretariat's salary structure.

109. Looking ahead, the **ECO Secretary General** indicated a potential need to submit a detailed report to the Council of Ministers for guidance, citing ongoing pressures and following the unresolved communications from the Embassy of Pakistan that raised valid queries which still remained unanswered. He acknowledged constructive proposals from delegates while advocating to expedite discussions. He assured the Council that an implementation scheme, integrating member state concerns and adhering to ECO regulations, would be finalized shortly and circulated for member

feedback. In conclusion, he underscored the Secretary General's role in decision-making processes outlined in the organization's staff regulations, emphasizing the need for mutual respect among stakeholders. Referring to the insulting Note Verbale dated 25 December 2023 received from the host side, he reiterates that if the pressure continues with such a unilateral approach, his last resort will be to compile and submit a detailed report to the Council of Ministers to clarify the Secretariat's position and seek guidance on the matter. However, he reaffirmed the Secretariat's commitment to transparent and comprehensive communication with all stakeholders, stressing the importance of constructive engagement as the implementation deadline approaches.

110. The **Chair** and the Permanent Representative of the Islamic Republic of **Iran** sought clarification from the Legal Advisor regarding the Secretary General's role in recommendations. He noted that the presence of Secretariat members in the working group and highlighted the Secretary General's involvement alongside representatives from Pakistan and other member states in the decision-making process. Addressing concerns about the implementation of 25th COM decision, he questioned that the Secretary General, instead of criticizing them, should have executed the 25th Council of Ministers' decision. He pointed out the Secretary General's tenure since 2021 and the responsibility associated with the role, highlighting the implications of delaying the implementation of the decision of the COM.

111. The ECO **Legal Advisor** explained that periodic salary reviews can be made at the recommendation of the Secretary General. Iran's request to amend the staff regulations, including the salary table, is valid under Article 31, which allows amendments upon any member state's request, he said.

112. The Permanent Representative of the Republic of **Azerbaijan** acknowledged the presence of contradictory views among member states and emphasized the importance of mutual respect and adherence to the organization's rules and regulations. He highlighted the necessity of observing the organization's charter, noting that a previous COM decision had approved an increase in the salaries of category A staff, which was recommended by the CPR and subsequently approved by COM. He stressed that the Secretariat and all colleagues are responsible for these issues and that recommendations should be considered timely and reported to the CPR. He underscored the importance of thorough preliminary review of the matters before submission to COM given that the Ministers approve proposals without making detailed consideration.

113. The Permanent Representative of the Republic of **Azerbaijan** proposed that instead of focusing immediate attention on the issue, they should use the time available until July 1, 2024 to reach a consensus. He pointed out a contradiction between the decisions of the 25th COM meeting, where one decision proposed increasing Category-III staff salaries and another suggested decreasing them. He called for clarification on this matter without contradicting COM decisions, which must be implemented. He urged the Secretariat to consider all matters properly according to the organization's rules and regulations and to report any contradictions to the CPR, adding that this approach would enable more thorough consideration before presenting issues to the honourable ministers. He concluded by advocating for a common view and proper reporting to ministers in future cases.

114. The Representative of the Islamic Republic of **Pakistan** expressed appreciation for the views put forward by Azerbaijani side, and emphasized that no one, including herself, opposes the decisions made by the COM. She highlighted that the role of the CPR is to provide recommendations to the COM, which relies on CPR's input, stressing that any difficulties or discrepancies in implementation should be addressed by the technical teams and the members of CPRs, not by the foreign ministers, as the responsibility lies with those present at such meetings which make recommendations to the COM. She reiterated the need to address discrepancies identified by the Secretary General, in accordance with the ECO charter and regulations. She also noted that, as explained by the Legal Advisor, the relevant articles of the ECO Staff Regulations entitle both the Member States and the Secretary General to propose amendments to the regulations.

115. Regarding the Report of the Second Working Group Meeting, the Representative of the Islamic Republic of **Pakistan** noted that her country neither gave consent thereon the document nor attended that meeting. Although the Pakistan's Permanent Representative consented to the proposal in goodwill upon the personal request made by Permanent Representative of Iran, it should be noted that Pakistan side did not participate in the Second Working Group Meeting. This has led to issues being observed by her ministry, as the matter was handled swiftly amidst sudden and unexpected developments. She cautioned that the matter is currently in the Court, which could lead to an embarrassing situation for all. She urged careful deliberation to ensure compliance with ECO regulations and local laws to avoid any potential court fines. To illustrate her point, she shared an example from the Pakistan Embassy International School & College Tehran (PEISCT), where an employee blackmailed the school by taking an internal issue to Court adding that the Court's orders resulted in significant financial losses for the PEISCT Embassy due to the imposition of penalties. In this pretext, she illustrated the sensitivity of Court matters and the tendency of the local Courts to mostly favor the employees over employers.

116. The ECO **Deputy Secretary General (Admn, EME, IR & IT)** explained that the Second Working Group was established by the CPR upon the request of Member States. The Working Group's role was to make recommendations, not decisions, and these recommendations did not necessarily require consensus. He represented the Secretariat, along with his assistant, the head of section, the chief accountant, the legal advisor, along with participation by representatives from some Member States. At the end of the committee meeting, a report was prepared and unanimously approved by CPR. The issues were further discussed in a subsequent CPR meeting.

117. The ECO **Deputy Secretary General (Admn, EME, IR & IT)** acknowledged that the issue was very serious and sensitive. The Secretariat should have taken measures from the beginning and considered all possibilities. Before establishing the working group, it was proposed to form an internal committee within the Secretariat, but this committee was not established. Recent decisions and revisions were made directly by the Secretary General without consulting the DSG Admin, who is responsible for these issues, or the other DSGs. Previously, the Secretary General would consult with other DSGs before making important decisions, but this consultation did not occur, nor was the Legal Advisor consulted. He also noted that in the last CPR decision, the CPR

advised the Secretariat to work with, consult and coordinate with the host country. However, this consultation with the host country did not take place.

118. The **ECO Secretary General** questioned whether the meeting was turning into a court to accuse him. He asked if scenes were being created to blame him for everything by the Chair, including by his subordinate DSG. He challenged the notion that rules were being broken and requested all representatives to intervene, citing a clear violation of the rules. He emphasized that the accusations were false and urged the meeting to maintain order and respect proper procedures.

119. The **Chair** and the Permanent Representative of the Islamic Republic of **Iran** asked the Deputy Secretary General about his role as the In-Charge of Administration.

120. The **ECO Deputy Secretary General (Admn, EME, IR & IT)** stated that his role encompasses advising the Secretary General and directing him on regulations, providing explanations, clarifying matters and ensuring proper management. He questioned the timing of the current discussion, highlighting its interesting nature. He queried why the Secretary General is bringing up new issues and remarks now, rather than addressing them earlier, including in the recent two or three years.

121. In addition, the **ECO Deputy Secretary General (Admn, EME, IR & IT)** highlighted the Secretariat's longstanding practice of adhering to the laws of the host country, which is a fundamental principle of international law. Specifically, he referenced legal documents pertinent to Iran, including Article 67 of the Diplomatic Relations of the Islamic Republic of Iran, which governs the employment and termination of local staff in resident missions and servant diplomats. He also mentioned the Diplomatic Guide and Directions published by Iran's Ministry of Foreign Affairs, emphasizing that these documents are legally binding. According to Article 7 of these regulations, Iranian labor law holds precedence as imperative law, which all diplomatic missions within Iran must comply with. The DSG noted that historically, the Secretariat has consistently applied Iranian laws, including labor and social security laws, particularly in matters concerning local staff.

122. The Permanent Representative of the Republic of **Tajikistan** proposed to conclude the current agenda item and allow the Secretariat to prepare a new salary scale. Emphasizing unanimous support for implementing COM decisions, he stated that clarity on implementation would arise with the new salary scale. He urged the Secretariat to justify any rejections or oppositions to new scale, particularly from the Iranian side. Highlighting the absence of a new scale currently under discussion, he expressed reluctance to participate in what he viewed as an illegitimate trial of the Secretary General. Instead, he emphasized his role in making decisions to resolve organizational issues as a representative of Tajikistan. He reiterated his proposal to conclude the current agenda item and proceed to the next, requesting consideration of member states' proposals.

123. The Representative of the Islamic Republic of **Pakistani** reiterated that discussions concerning internal administrative matters related to the Secretary General should not be addressed in this forum. She emphasized the need for improved communication amidst ongoing debates, suggesting that any administrative concerns should be addressed within the Secretariat's internal business. She urged maintaining

decorum and avoiding heated debates or exchanges of such nature of views during CPR proceedings. She requested that this stance be accurately documented in the report to reflect their position. She encouraged avoiding unnecessary confrontations that may lead to mutual embarrassment.

124. The **ECO Deputy Secretary General (TI & AI)** emphasized the deep respect held for the Secretary General by all present, highlighting the fundamental role of the Secretariat staff as servants employed by the Member States, with the Secretary General as their head. He underscored the importance of including the Secretariat's inputs to ensure comprehensive and specialized views in decision-making processes. He noted concerns about discussions on legal and accounting matters without consulting relevant experts within the Secretariat. He suggested that there may be a communication gap hindering the representation of their views effectively. Drawing on his experience in international bodies, he emphasized the principle that the Secretariat serves at the discretion of Member States. He questioned why alleged deficiencies in decisions were not addressed earlier in the approval process or during the silence procedure.

125. The **ECO Deputy Secretary General (TI & AI)** urged a balanced and non-emotional approach to decision-making, respecting ministerial decisions while advocating for thorough coordination and consultation, particularly with Iran as stipulated, by upcoming deadlines. He reassured the availability of the legal advisor to address any legal inquiries. He concluded with a respectful request to extend the Secretariat's timeline until the end of June for proper coordination and consultation.

126. The Representative of the Islamic Republic of **Pakistan** expressed regret in taking the floor again and reiterated concerns about inclusivity, referencing Pakistan Embassy's Note Verbale dated 19 March 2024, which has yet to receive a response. She noted that the reasons for the silence on Pakistan's queries remain unclear. Additionally, she emphasized the need to address internal matters within the ECO Secretariat rather than bringing them to the attention of Member States in this manner.

127. The **Chair and the Permanent Representative of the Islamic Republic of Iran** emphasized the COM decision and the CPR deadline for implementing it by the end of June. Stressing the importance of possible consultation with the host country, the Chair underscored that the decision must be fully executed by 30 June.

128. The Representative of the Islamic Republic of **Pakistan** raised significant concerns regarding the issues highlighted by the Secretary General and the subsequent counter-arguments from his team. She expressed uncertainty about the authority of the Deputy Secretaries General, emphasizing that, to her understanding and knowledge, all legal and binding documents of the ECO clearly delineate the authority of the Member States and the Secretary General. She strongly recommended that the Secretary General issue a Note Verbale to detail his concerns, allowing these to be communicated to their respective capitals for appropriate instructions. She argued that this approach would be more efficient than engaging in prolonged discussions within the CPR. She underscored that, according to ECO Rules and Regulations, the implementation of COM decisions is the direct responsibility of the Secretary General by the date designated by the COM or otherwise.

129. The **Chair** and the Permanent Representative of the Islamic Republic of **Iran** concluded that there is a decision by the Council of Ministers (COM) and a corresponding decision by the Council of Permanent Representatives (CPR) to implement the COM decision by 30 June. He noted that if consultation with the host country is necessary, it should take place now, as it seems required. He further mentioned that there will be no CPR meeting before 30 June, so the consultation must occur between the Secretariat and the host country. Speaking on behalf of his own country, not as the Chair, he stated that the host country is open to any informal consultation to facilitate the implementation of the COM decision, which was made through the silence procedure.

- Consideration of possibility Reallocation of funds in condition of being adequate cash at the end of the year between the Chapters of ECO budget 2024 without creation of increase in the total size of budget for Medical Reimbursement

130. The **ECO Chief Accountant** explained that the medical expenses for one of the staff members have exceeded a third of the allocated budget for 2024, despite there being more than 45 staff members. Considering the inflation rate for medical treatment in the country, the Secretariat cannot afford to cover this amount. Therefore, they will only be able to pay the actual costs, especially since the staff member's tenure is ending soon. To manage this situation, the Secretariat needs the authorization of the CPR by the end of the year. This would involve adjusting some allocated budget chapters if there is enough cash available. If possible, the Secretariat would then be able to pay the remaining dollar portion of these expenses to the staff member.

131. The **Council** authorized the Secretariat for making necessary transfer of fund between the relevant budget chapters to meet the remaining portion of the expenses to the concerned staff.

- Recommendations of the Selection Panel

132. Clarifying that her query is not about the selection panel, the Representative of the Islamic Republic of **Pakistan** inquired about the circulation of vacancies, specifically the post of Head of Section for Administration which will fall vacant soon. She reminded that it was recognized by 285th CPR Meeting in Yazd that all posts should be circulated 3 to 4 months before the incumbent staff's tenure ended. She requested the reason for the delay and the non-circulation of the posts within the agreed timeframe.

133. The **Chair** and the Permanent Representative of the Islamic Republic of **Iran** inquired why the procedure was not followed by the Secretariat.

134. In response to the Chair's inquiry, the **ECO Secretary General** stated that the question should be addressed to him, emphasizing that he is still in charge of the organization and requested patience as his tenure has only two months remaining. He expressed regret that despite both oral and written instructions to circulate the Note Verbale, these directives were disregarded by the administration. He admitted he did not know why the instructions were not followed or where the failure occurred, but insisted the directives were given in a timely manner. Due to the non-implementation,

the Secretary General issued an internal memo to the relevant staff member demanding justification for the failure to follow his instructions.

135. The **ECO Deputy Secretary General (Admn, EME, IR & IT)** explained that during the CPR meeting in Yazd, the issue was discussed but no final decision or position was recorded in the CPR report. He reminded the Chair that he had raised a request on behalf of the Secretariat, under the Secretary General's instruction, to establish a specific period for announcing vacant positions. He added that the Chair, representing Iran, stated that there was no need to specify a timeframe for announcing vacancies, noting that member states should already be aware of the tenures end dates for their respective staff members. Consequently, it was deemed unnecessary to set specific periods for P category positions. However, for SG and DSG positions, the August Council had stipulated a timeframe of 3 to 4 months, as mentioned by the distinguished representative of Iran. No decision was made at the Yazd meeting regarding vacancy announcements for Directors and Program Officers, as a result, the Secretary General's section was implemented and communicated to the member states.

136. The **ECO Deputy Secretary General (Admn, EME, IR & IT)** took this opportunity to inform the Council that the office term of the Head of Section for Administration would end on July 10, 2024. He noted that there would likely be no CPR meeting before that date. If a meeting were to occur before July 10, the issue could be addressed then; otherwise, it should be resolved now, he stated. The host country had sent a Note Verbale to the Secretariat, which was circulated to member states in a timely manner. The host country requested an extension of the tenure of Head of Section for Administration until his successor arrived. Given that there would not be a COM meeting during this period, the Deputy Secretary General humbly suggested that the CPR make a decision regarding the extension of the Head of Section Administration through a 14-day silence procedure.

137. The Representative of the Islamic Republic of **Pakistan** recalled that the report of the 285th CPR meeting explicitly acknowledged the practice of circulating Category-I and II posts 3 to 4 months before the incumbent staff complete their tenures. She emphasized that both directing and professional staff fall within this recognized criterion for vacancy circulation. She also noted that the CPR agenda is circulated two weeks before the meeting, and the item proposed by the distinguished DSG was not included in the circulated agenda. Therefore, she proposed deferring any decision regarding the recent extension request until the next CPR meeting, in accordance with the provisions for CPR business and the inclusion of any item in its agenda, which requires 14 days' notice before the meeting.

138. The **ECO Secretary General** expressed regret over uninformed remarks made by the Deputy Secretary General (DSG), who is in charge of administration. He emphasized that the DSG should be well-versed in the established practices, rules and regulations of the Organization with their better understanding than anyone else. Referencing the report from the 285th meeting of the Council of Permanent Representatives (CPR) in Yazd, he stated that the meeting recognized and reaffirmed the established practice of announcing vacancies for Category-I and II positions three to four months before the current officeholders' service tenures end.

139. Addressing a question from the representative of Pakistan, **ECO Secretary General** reiterated that he had instructed the administration section multiple times through his Chef de Cabinet followed by a formal communication that questioned such a negligence for not circulating the post, but all those instructions were ignored without any logical justification. He stated that the DSG's understanding that there was no need to circulate such posts if the staff's tenure is ending, is not a valid excuse for not implementing the Secretary General's instructions. In addition, he recalled that he did not authorize his deputy to raise this issue during the meeting but to his surprise, the DSG took the floor without the Secretary General's prior consent.

140. The **ECO Deputy Secretary General (Admn, EME, IR & IT)** confronted the ECO Secretary General, demanding why the matter was not discussed with him. He expressed astonishment and frustration over the Secretary General's failure to consult with him or other colleagues.

141. The **ECO Secretary General** reiterated that the DSG was not authorized to discuss this issue during the meeting and highlighted some policy issues noting that there are established criteria for adding cases like staff extensions and appointments to the CPR agenda. This criterion requires nominations to be circulated among member states two weeks before the CPR meeting with prior review by the Selection Panel for necessary recommendations to CPR. He referenced a decision from the 248th CPR meeting, which excluded a staff re-appointment case due to not meeting the timeframe required for inclusion of such matters in the CPR agenda.

142. In addition, the **ECO Secretary General** referenced Article 18, Chapter 3 concerning the rules of procedure, which states that any member country may propose new items for the Council of Ministers or Council of Permanent Representatives agendas. These proposals must be submitted to the Secretariat for circulation at least two weeks before the draft agenda is finalized. He pointed out that the issue raised by the DSG contradicts ECO regulations and CPR conclusions. Additionally, the DSG's intervention deviates from internal policy, which requires prior consultation between the Secretary General and relevant directing staff before raising issues during CPR proceedings. According to agreed procedures, any positions nearing the end of their tenure should be circulated three to four months before the current officeholders' terms end, he repeated with particular reference to the 285th CPR meeting in Yazd that recognized and reaffirmed this practice, deciding to follow it for the incoming Secretary General from Pakistan as well.

143. The **ECO Secretary General** again mentioned that his numerous verbal and email instructions to the administration were utterly ignored, and noted that the request for the extension of the incumbent Head of Section for administration was received on June 3, 2025, just two days before the CPR meeting, and has yet to be circulated due to administrative reasons. He further stated that, in accordance with Article 6.4 and other relevant staff regulations, he will formally communicate with the nominating country regarding this case of extension. He recommended no discussion on the issue at this premature stage as it contradicts ECO rules of procedure.

144. The **ECO Secretary General** once again drew the Council's attention to Paragraph 41 from the report of the 248th CPR meeting held on December 23, 2020. He underscored that at that time, the Representative of the Republic of Türkiye and the

Chair of the Selection panel informed the Council that the Panel deferred discussion on the nomination of an Afghan national for the post of Program Officer to the next CPR meeting due to its non-adherence to the agreed procedure, which requires the circulation of any nomination amongst the Member States at least 14 days before the CPR meeting.

145. The Representative of the Islamic Republic of **Iran** referred to their Note Verbale dated June 2, 2024, sent to the Secretariat regarding the extension of the incumbent Head of Section for Administration until his successor joins the ECO Secretariat. He emphasized that the request clearly states their delegation's desire for the tenure of the incumbent Head of Section to be extended under these circumstances.

146. The **ECO Deputy Secretary General (Admn, EME, IR & IT)** noted that previously some similar cases had been considered by the CPR without meeting the specified criteria. He acknowledged his current inability to provide details on such cases presented to the CPR, typically before four or five days to the meeting. Furthermore, he highlighted that the Head of Section for Administration had undergone an interview with the Selection Panel prior to his appointment and had no adverse record. Additionally, the Deputy Secretary General emphasized that the ECO Secretary General had assessed the current Head of Section for Administration positively in his remarks.

147. The Representative of the Islamic Republic of **Pakistan** highlighted that the issue at hand pertained not to the current Head of Section or past precedents, but rather to the lateness of the nomination, which lacked regulatory precedents for the Council's consideration. She emphasized the importance of maintaining mutual respect among the seasoned diplomats and ambassadors present, urging the Chair to guide the session to a constructive conclusion in accordance with the established rules and regulations of the ECO, agreed upon by all member countries. She proposed deferring the case to the next Council meeting. Furthermore, she noted previous instances where staff members continued their duties with retrospective approval from the CPR. She discouraged further debate on this matter, expressing concern that esteemed Council members should avoid undermining or disrespecting each other.

148. The **Chair** and the Permanent Representative of the Islamic Republic of **Iran** emphasized that, as per their information, the organization has never fully observed this specified criteria. He noted two main issues. First, the organization announces vacancies three to four months in advance. Second, the position in question belongs to Iran and is not open to all members. He added that due to internal procedures, Iran may be unable to replace the incumbent by the time his term ends, and may send a note stating that the current staff will continue until his replacement arrives. This process is necessary to ensure continuity since the position is designated for Iran, even if the vacancy was announced ten months ago and internal procedures are slow, he underlined.

149. The Representative of the Islamic Republic of **Pakistan** reiterated that this issue was not included in the agenda, and as per rules of procedure it should be deferred for next meeting.

150. The **Chair** and the Permanent Representative of the Islamic Republic of **Iran** once again emphasized on their understanding that the current staff member will remain in position until his successor joins, adding that this could be effective immediately or at a later date, as decisions have been applied retrospectively in the past. He stressed the need to expedite their internal procedures to facilitate early replacement against the post.

151. The Representative of the Islamic Republic of **Pakistan** maintained her request, asking the Secretariat to circulate a necessary note regarding Iran's request to extend the service of the current Head of the Administration Section until his successor arrives, in accordance with the agreed principles. She emphasized that the Council should allow the Secretary General to exercise his mandate, avoiding unnecessary debate and arguments.

152. The **ECO Secretary General** again noted that the problem is not with sending or receiving the notes verbales. Instead, the issue lies with the unjustifiable delay in implementing the Secretary General's clear instruction to circulate the note verbale regarding this post. This circulation was necessary for member states to discuss the issue and include it in the agenda for decision-making, he repeated. The Secretary General expressed confusion about why his instructions were not heeded, emphasizing that the delay is not related to receiving the note verbale from Iran's Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

153. The **Chair** and the Permanent Representative of the Islamic Republic of **Iran** concluded that the report would reflect the Council's consideration of the Note Verbale from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs dated June 2, 2024. It was noted that the Head of Section for Administration may remain in his position until his replacement joins the Secretariat. The Chair stated that the necessary formalities will be completed according to CPR rules and procedures, and a decision will be made even without a two-week pre-notice. He emphasized that all actions will adhere to the rules and procedures. The delegation understands that there is no objection to this extension until the new Head of Section arrives, and the formalities will be addressed accordingly.

Agenda Item No.12

Any other business

154. The Permanent Representative of the **Kyrgyz** Republic announced that Bishkek will host the 10th Central Asia Mining and Geology Forum, MINEX Central Asia, on June 19-20, 2024. He mentioned that invitations had already been sent to the relevant Ministers of the Member States, expecting their participation in the event. He added that an invitation was also extended to H.E. the ECO Secretary General, who has formally expressed his inability to attend the Forum due to prior commitments. The Permanent Representative hoped the ECO Secretary General will nominate relevant staff to represent him at the event.

155. The Representative of the Islamic Republic of **Iran** announced that Iran will host the 19th Ministers of Foreign Affairs of the Asia Cooperation Dialogue on June 24, 2024. He noted that many ECO member countries are also part of this dialogue. Invitations have been sent to the ministers to participate in this important meeting in Tehran, which will be preceded by a senior officials meeting scheduled for June 23, 2024. The

relevant notes have been dispatched to concerned embassies and to Iranian embassies abroad. He requested a prompt and positive response from the ministers and senior officials to ensure the success of the event.

156. The **ECO Secretary General** thanked the Republic of Kazakhstan for fully paying their 2024 annual contribution to ECO, noting the Republic of Tajikistan has also completed their budgetary share for the current year. However, these contributions account for only 19% of this year's total budget. He expressed concern as the Organization enters its sixth month of the financial year, which complicates participation in member state events, including that to be hosted by Kyrgyz Republic. The Secretariat would need to cover all related expenses if it decides to participate, given the current financial strain. Highlighting the upcoming transition in leadership, he stressed the need to ensure financial stability for the incoming Secretary General to help him focus on the organization's goals. He urged other member countries to expedite their membership contributions to support this effort.

Agenda Item No. 13

Date of the next CPR Meeting

157. The Council agreed to hold its next (289th) meeting on July 1, 2024 (Monday) at the ECO Secretariat.

LIST OF PARTICIPANTS**The Embassy of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan:****The Republic of Azerbaijan:**

- H.E. Mr. Ali Alizade, **Permanent Representative**

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Islamic Republic of Iran:

- H.E. Mr. Seyed Jalaledin Alavi Sabzevari, **Permanent Representative**
- Mr. Behzad Azarsa, Senior Expert, Multilateral & International Economic Cooperation
- Mr. Musa Khosravi Moghadam, ECO Expert, Multilateral & International Economic Cooperation

The Embassy of the Republic of Kazakhstan:

- H.E. Mr. Ontalap Onalbayev, **Permanent Representative**
- Mr. Kuanish Agaidarov, First Secretary

The Embassy of the Kyrgyz Republic:

- H.E. Mr. Turdakun Sydykov, **Permanent Representative**

The Embassy of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan:

- Ms. Khirat, First Secretary

The Embassy of the Republic of Tajikistan:

- H.E. Mr. Nizomiddin Zohidi, **Permanent Representative**
- Mr. Bahodur Nazir, Counselor

The Embassy of the Republic of Türkiye:

- Dr. Firat Bayar, Deputy Head of Mission
- Mr. Ertan Garip, Counselor

The Embassy of Turkmenistan:

- Mr. Kemal Atayev, Third Secretary

The Embassy of the Republic of Uzbekistan:**The ECO Secretariat:**

- H.E. Amb. Khusrav Noziri, Secretary General
- Amb. Mohsen Esperi, Deputy Secretary General
- Amb. Huseyin Avni Bicakli, Deputy Secretary General
- Amb. Jandos Asanov, Deputy Secretary General
- Amb. Kashif Zaman, Deputy Secretary General
- Mr. Hojjat Moghavem, Legal Adviser
- Mr. Sukhrob Mirzoaliev, Head of CFU
- Mr. Muhammad Ahmed Raza, Senior Desk Officer



Economic Cooperation Organization

ECO

No: CFU/2024/772

Priority: Most Urgent

Date: 12/6/2024

Attachment: Yes

The Secretariat of the Economic Cooperation Organization (ECO) presents its compliments to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Islamic Republic of Iran and the Embassies of ECO Member States in Tehran and has the honour to convey the self-explanatory Note Verbale No. ECO-7/2/2024-A/19/323 dated June 11, 2024 received from the Embassy of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan in Tehran along with the views/comments regarding the Draft Report of 288th Meeting of CPR held on June 5, 2024 at the ECO Secretariat.

The Secretariat avails itself of this opportunity to renew to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Islamic Republic of Iran and the Embassies of ECO Member States in Tehran the assurances of its highest consideration.

All ECO Member States - Tehran





By FAX
Embassy of Pakistan
Tehran

No. ECO-7/2/2024-A/19/323

11 June, 2024

The Embassy of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan in Tehran presents its compliments to the ECO Secretariat in Tehran with reference to ECO Secretariat's Note Verbale No. CFU/2024/769 dated 10 June, 2024 regarding forwarding the **Draft Report of the 288th CPR Meeting** held on 5th June, 2024 in ECO Secretariat, Tehran has the honour to share views/comments (in green & italic) of this Embassy.

The esteemed Secretariat is requested to kindly review the views/comments of this Embassy and re-circulate the **Revised Draft Report** after incorporating the views of this Embassy.

The Embassy of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan avails itself of this opportunity to renew to the Secretariat of Economic Cooperation Organization in Tehran, the assurances of its highest consideration.

ECO Secretariat
Tehran – Iran



288th Meeting of the Council of Permanent Representatives (CPR)

Draft Report

June 5, 2024
ECO Secretariat, Tehran

Draft Report

Under the chairmanship of the Islamic Republic of Iran, the 288th CPR Meeting , held on June 5, 2025, was attended by the Permanent Representatives/Representatives Republic of Azerbaijan, Islamic Republic of Iran, Republic of Kazakhstan, Islamic Republic of Pakistan, Republic of Tajikistan, Republic of Türkiye, Turkmenistan and Republic of Uzbekistan. The ECO Secretary General and the relevant Staff of the Secretariat also attended the Meeting. List of participants is enclosed as Annexure-I.

2. The Meeting commenced with sincere condolences from distinguished Members of the Council and the ECO Secretary General for the tragic loss of Iranian President H.E. Mr. Ebrahim Raisi and Foreign Minister H.E. Dr. Hossein Amir-Abdollahian, who perished in a recent helicopter crash. The Council acknowledged President Raisi and Foreign Minister Amir-Abdollahian as visionary leaders committed to Iran's progress and prosperity. In solidarity with the government and people of Iran, the Council observed a one-minute silence in their honor, recognizing their legacies as inspirations for continued regional cooperation and economic advancement.

3. The distinguished Members of the Council and the ECO Secretary General also expressed their heartfelt condolences to the Representative of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan, Ms. Khirat, on the recent passing of her father. They acknowledged her loss with deep sympathy and extended their support during this difficult time.

4. The **Chair** and the Permanent Representative of the Islamic Republic of **Iran** expressed heartfelt gratitude to the Council for their thoughtful condolences regarding the recent tragic incident that claimed the lives of Iran's high-ranking and esteemed leaders. He especially thanked to Pakistan and Türkiye for the observance of public mourning by their respective nations. He requested the participating delegates to convey, on behalf of his government and delegation, their sincere gratitude to their leadership for the sympathy and thoughtfulness towards Iran and its leadership.

5. The Representative of the Islamic Republic of **Pakistan** also acknowledged with deep gratitude the sympathetic words expressed by the distinguished Members of the Council concerning the recent demise of her father.

6. Besides, the **Council** warmly welcomed the new Ambassador of the Republic of Kazakhstan, H.E. Mr. [Name], as the country's Permanent Representative to ECO, expressing confidence that his extensive experience and expertise would significantly enhance the Council's deliberations and proceedings. The Council looked forward to his valuable contributions in fostering regional cooperation and advancing the goals of ECO.

7. The Permanent Representative of the Republic of **Kazakhstan** thanked the eminent Members of the Council for their warm welcome to him. He emphasized Kazakhstan's commitment to the ECO, highlighting his previous experience at the Embassy in Tehran and the importance of the ECO in current geopolitical and economic contexts. He reaffirmed Kazakhstan's dedication to enhancing trade and economic

relations within the ECO, supported by active participation in regional summits and fulfilling financial obligations, expressing confidence in the collective efforts to implement regional initiatives and strengthen the ECO's well-being.

Agenda Item No. 1

Adoption of the Agenda

8. Due to the lack of quorum, the First Meeting of the High-Level Committee (HLC) of the ECO Deputy Foreign Ministers was postponed. Consequently, the Council agreed to re-title item 3 of the agenda to "*Report of the ECO Vision 2025 Review Committee*" and adopted the revised agenda accordingly.

- Adoption of Draft Agenda of the 288th CPR Meeting;
- Adoption of Draft Report of the 287th CPR Meeting;
- Report of the ECO Vision 2025 Review Committee
- Approval of ECO Work Programme 2024;
- Inclusion of Agriculture Section into Framework of Cooperation between ECO and ASEAN;
- Establishment of a Working Group on Joint Trade Zones (JTZs) in the ECO region;
- Participation at the International Tourism Symposium and Expo;
- Extension of invitation to Afghanistan to participate at ECOTA Meeting;
- Participation at the Third Ministerial Meeting of the Trade Preferential System among the Member States of the OIC Trade Negotiations Committee;
- Appointment of the new ECO Deputy Secretary General (TC & HRSD);
- Administrative and budgetary matters:
 - Reallocation of ECO Budget of 2024;
 - Consideration of possibility Reallocation of funds in condition of being adequate cash at the end of the year between the Chapters of ECO budget 2024 without creation of increase in the total size of budget for Medical Reimbursement;
 - Recommendations of the Selection Panel.
- Any other business;
- Date of the next CPR Meeting.

Agenda Item No. 2

Adoption of Draft Report of the 287th CPR Meeting

9. The **Council** adopted the Draft Report of the 287th CPR Meeting held on May 6, 2024 at the ECO Secretariat, and circulated amongst the Member States vide Note Verbale No. CFU/2024/630 dated May 13, 2024.

Agenda Item No. 3

Report of the ECO Vision 2025 Review Committee

10. The **Economic Advisor** provided an overview from the draft report of ECO Vision 2025 Review Committee. He highlighted that the 30th ECO Summit in Islamabad

in March 2017 adopted the ECO Vision 2025, outlining a strategic roadmap for sustainable economic growth. A mid-term review conducted in 2021 assessed progress towards these goals. Following declarations from the 27th ECO Council of Ministers and ECO Council of Permanent Representatives meetings, the ECO Vision 2025 Review Committee was established to evaluate progress under this framework. From April to May 2024, the committee, chaired by Mr. Behzad Azarsa, Senior Expert, Multilateral & International Economic Cooperation, Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Islamic Republic of Iran, assessed activities since 2021, focusing on refining project priorities and enhancing regional connectivity and cooperation.

11. The **Economic Advisor** added that the committee recommended extending or renewing the Vision post-2025 to sustain momentum and address new challenges for regional integration and sustainable development. The report, based on evaluations conducted from 2021 onwards and aligned with insights from the mid-term review, emphasized optimizing priorities and ensuring effective project execution. It identified areas for improvement and refined strategies to better achieve Vision objectives. Recommendations included submitting a document outlining priority projects for approval by the CPR and COM, following circulation of the comprehensive report among member states.

12. The **Chair** and the Permanent Representative of the Islamic Republic of **Iran** expressed gratitude for the comprehensive briefing by Economic Advisor on the draft report of the ECO Vision 2025 Review Committee. He appreciated the informative nature of the presentation. He invited the participants to share their comments on the report.

13. Regarding the Vision Review Committee Meeting Report, the Representative of the Republic of **Türkiye** mentioned ongoing process in Ankara on the Vision 2025 document, noting its detailed nature and the current review by Turkish authorities. He requested additional time to finalize their views and recommendations in this regard. Concerning the rescheduling of the High Level Committee of Deputy Foreign Ministers, he indicated that he did not yet receive instructions from Ankara and requested deferral of the case, accordingly.

14. The **Chair** and the Permanent Representative of the Islamic Republic of **Iran** recalled that the Vision Committee's report was supposed to be submitted to the Deputy Foreign Ministers' meeting, which was postponed due to a lack of quorum. Stressing the importance of advancing the process independently of the meeting's schedule, he confirmed the draft report had been circulated among member states and requested feedback from them. To expedite the report's finalization, he proposed a 10-day feedback period, followed by collaboration between the Secretariat and Chair to integrate inputs into a consolidated document. Additionally, he suggested reconvening the Vision Review Committee, potentially at the ambassadorial level, to ensure the report's completion and distribution. Simultaneously, preparations for the Deputy Foreign Ministers' meeting would continue. The Chair concluded by noting unanimous support and expressed gratitude for contributions to the Vision 2025 review process on behalf of the Chairmanship and CPR.

15. The **ECO Secretary General** proposed using the agenda item to discuss and decide on new dates for the First Meeting of the High-Level Committee (HLC), or at

least to exchange views on this matter. Stressing the importance of maximizing participation from Deputy Foreign Ministers, he suggested hearing from each member state on their preferred dates for convening the meeting in Tehran. He noted that the first week of August would be suitable for him, as his tenure concludes on August 12, 2024. He emphasized the need for prompt scheduling and, if necessary, suggested considering the availability of the next Secretary General in case the HLC Meeting cannot be scheduled before his tenure ends.

16. The Permanent Representative of **Azerbaijani** proposed coordinating with the host country to finalize official dates and promptly informing the Honourable ECO Deputy Ministers. He suggested considering one or two alternative dates to seek confirmation on participation of the Deputy Foreign Ministers in the meeting.

17. The Permanent Representative of **Tajikistan** suggested that dates for the HLC Meeting be presented for all countries to consider collectively. He noted the possibility of differences if each country chooses its own dates, proposing instead that the Secretary and Chair offer one or two dates for unified consideration by the Member States.

18. The Permanent Representative of **Kazakhstan** expressed support for the Secretary General's proposal as more acceptable. He underscored the need of coordinating and obtaining approval for the proposed date from the authorities in Kazakhstan, requesting formal communication from the ECO Secretariat on this issue.

19. *The Representative of **Pakistan** emphasized the need to coordinate with the offices of the Deputy Foreign Ministers for scheduling the HLC Meeting. She expressed agreement with the Secretary General's proposal and suggested promptly working on securing suitable dates or a range of dates in this regard*

20. The **Chair** and the Permanent Representative of the Islamic Republic of **Iran** concluded that the Secretariat would wait for 10 days to receive feedback from member countries regarding the report of ECO Vision 2025 Review Committee, before scheduling its final meeting. Additionally, the Secretariat would propose one principal date and possibly two alternative dates in a note to facilitate consultation with ECO Capitals. This is to reach an agreement on the date for the rescheduling the first meeting of the High-Level Committee, he said.

Agenda Item No. 4

Approval of ECO Work Programme 2024

21. Regarding ECO Work Programme 2024, the **Chair** and the Permanent Representative of the Islamic Republic of **Iran** noted that the matter was previously discussed, and it appeared that consensus had been reached on a particular proposal put forth by the Republic of Turkey. However, he noted that there were some further considerations or observations regarding this proposal, inviting the Representative of Republic of Turkey to elaborate on the current issue.

22. The Representative of the Republic of **Türkiye** expressed conciseness in addressing the matter, noting that they had submitted a note on May 14, 2024 thereby presenting two alternative drafts for consideration. He expressed readiness to read the

drafts if requested, or alternatively, provide copies for review. He concluded by stating their willingness to proceed according to the preferred method of the committee.

23. The **Chair** and the Permanent Representative of the Islamic Republic of **Iran** noted that the note containing two alternative proposals was circulated by the Secretariat on May 1, 2024. He requested the Secretariat to elaborate and clarify the details of these proposals to facilitate the decision-making process. Highlighting that it is now June and the program has not yet been finalized, the Chair underscored the urgency of resolving this matter, given the passage of almost half a year.

24. The **ECO Secretary General** confirmed the receipt of two alternative texts from Türkiye aimed at replacing sections in the draft Work Program 2024. The first option is longer and emphasizes inviting non-ratified member states to ratify the Charter and Additional Protocol, facilitating the Foundation's operational effectiveness in science, technology and innovation for regional economic development. The second option is shorter and focuses on the Council's discussion regarding the ratification issue, he said. The Secretary General offered to read the longer option again if desired, leaving the decision on the Council.

25. The **Chair** and the Permanent Representative of the Islamic Republic of **Iran** asked the preference of the Secretariat regarding these two options. Moreover, he looked forward to the Representative of Pakistan for any feedback in the matter.

26. The Secretariat's preference leans towards the first option, the longer one. However, the final decision rests with the August Council, the **ECO Secretary General** stated.

27. The Representative of the Islamic Republic of **Pakistan** mentioned that they are awaiting inputs from their headquarters on the matter, which will be conveyed in due course.

28. The **Chair** and the Permanent Representative of the Islamic Republic of **Iran** thanked the distinguished colleague from Pakistan and proposed that the matter be handled through consultation between Pakistan's Secretariat and the Republic of Turkey. They suggested giving them the mandate to agree on one alternative. Once agreed upon, the Secretariat would circulate it for a two-week silence procedure. The Chair noted no objections to this proposal and instructed the Secretariat, Pakistan, and Turkey to collaborate on a mutually acceptable alternative for the work program phrase, ensuring no substantive changes in content or nature.

Agenda Item No. 5

Inclusion of Agriculture Section into Framework of Cooperation between ECO and ASEAN

29. The **ECO Deputy Secretary General (TI & AI)** highlighted an existing Memorandum of Understanding between ILO and ECO, followed by a framework for cooperation that lacked a crucial component in agriculture. It has been proposed and agreed to include a new section on agriculture. The Deputy Secretary General requested member states' agreement to finalize this addition through an exchange of letters between distinguished Ministers of Iran and ASEAN, who serve as focal points.

30. The **Chair** and the Permanent Representative of the Islamic Republic of **Iran** stated it appears that authorization is required from the ECO side, whereas ASEAN has already provided their consent.

31. The **ECO Deputy Secretary General (TI & AI)** responded ASEAN has indicated their readiness through a note. Once both sides agree, the two Ministers of Iran and Malaysia, representing the chairmanship of their respective bodies, will finalize the agreement, he added.

32. The **Chair** and the Permanent Representative of the Islamic Republic of **Iran** noted that one part has been neglected or omitted in the MOU or document. Both sides had already agreed at the secretariat level to include this part on agriculture, he noted, adding that they need authorization from our side to proceed with discussions and finalize it. The Chair suggested that the proposal should then return to the membership of both sides for final approval.

33. The **ECO Secretary General** referred to the Malaysian Embassy's proposal regarding the finalization process that suggests adopting their standard practice used with international partners to incorporate an additional sentence rather than a paragraph. He said that initially proposed paragraphs from secretariat were recommended for deletion by ASEAN's secretariat, with only one sentence remaining. This sentence emphasizes the importance of cooperation between the two organizations in agriculture, he mentioned. The Secretary General confirmed agreement with this approach and ASEAN's proposal to add the sentence as an annex to the framework of cooperation, not the MOU. Pending CPR's agreement, the Secretary General proposed informing ASEAN and initiating an exchange of letters between Malaysian Embassy and Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Iran who currently coordinate ASEAN and ECO respectively. This procedure was endorsed by ASEAN, he stated.

34. The **Council** found no objection to the proposal and authorized the Secretariat to continue discussions with the ASEAN to agree on this new area of cooperation as an annex to the previously agreed document, through the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Iran and the Malaysian Embassy in Tehran.

Agenda Item No. 6

Establishment of a Working Group on Joint Trade Zones (JTZs) in the ECO region

35. The **ECO Economic Advisor** reported on the ECO team's visit to the Sarakhs-Sarakhs and Incheh Borun-Altyn Asyr border checkpoints between Turkmenistan and Iran, from May 7 to 10, 2024. He said that the purpose of their visit was to explore Turkmenistan's proposal for establishing Joint Trade Zones with Iran, evaluating its potential impact, resource requirements and formulating recommendations. Discussions included updates on Turkmenistan's similar project with Uzbekistan and Iran's existing Special Economic Zone in Sarakhs, which focuses on streamlining business processes. The ECO team stressed aligning project documents with ECO's strategic goals and promoting economic, trade and transport cooperation among member states. They highlighted the establishment of joint trade zones as pivotal for boosting inter-regional trade.

36. The **ECO Economic Advisor** proposed forming a Working Group comprising representatives from foreign affairs, trade, transportation agencies, customs and other relevant ministries to finalize concepts and terms of reference for feasibility studies and legal frameworks. Additionally, he suggested involving financial institutions to secure necessary resources. Future visits to other regions were also proposed to further similar initiatives.

37. The **Chair** and the Permanent Representative of the Islamic Republic of **Iran** expressed appreciation for the proposal and emphasized the importance of developing two framework documents for an additional protocol on trade and customs tariffs. He welcomed the initiative, foreseeing its utility in establishing Joint Trade Zones among member states. Following a presentation, he sought clarification on whether the proposed working group for Joint Trade Zones would be ad-hoc or permanent.

38. The Permanent Representative of the Republic of **Tajikistan** proposed establishing a working group specifically tasked with implementing the border checkpoint visits agreed upon by the Council. He emphasized that the field visit to Turkmenistan and Iran's border checkpoints, as highlighted by the Economic Advisor, could serve as a model for similar visits to other member states' borders. Additionally, he expressed gratitude for the work done and suggested including permanent representatives in future visits to border checkpoints to better understand their capacities and potential.

39. The **Chair** and the Permanent Representative of the Islamic Republic of **Iran** agreed with the proposal made by his Tajik counterpart to include the permanent representatives in the ECO delegation during such visits. He suggested establishing a working group to develop the two documents mentioned. Once finalized, these documents would be circulated among member states, ensuring thorough recognition and updates for the working group. He received no objections to establishing the working group to focus on the mandates outlined in the agenda. Additionally, he supported inviting government representatives and interested parties to join visits to other border crossing points, emphasizing inclusivity and relevance.

40. Recognizing the importance of this initiative, the **Council** approved the establishment of the proposed Working Group to finalize the concept and ToR for the feasibility study and to develop the necessary legal frameworks for Joint Trade Zones (JTZs).

Agenda Item No. 7

Participation at the International Tourism Symposium and EXPO

41. The **ECO Director for Tourism** briefed that the Secretariat received an invitation from the Pakistan Tourism Development Corporation to attend the International Tourism Symposium and Expo in Islamabad on June 10-11, 2024. The event will feature panel discussions on topics including green investment in tourism, connectivity improvement, conservation of cultural and natural heritage, Pakistan's tourism perception, innovation in tourism education and presentations on tourism investment opportunities, as well as B2B meetings.

42. **The ECO Director for Tourism** further stated that the symposium aims to gather tourism experts from regional and international organizations such as UN Tourism, Shanghai Cooperation Organization, World Bank and member states to discuss Pakistan's tourism sector. PTDC has offered to cover accommodation for three nights and internal transportation for one ECO delegate. The Secretariat views this as an opportunity to assess tourism cooperation among member states and support regional tourism development. Approval from CPR is sought for Secretariat's participation, as the Symposium is not listed in the 2024 calendar of events.

43. The **Chair** and the Permanent Representative of the Islamic Republic of **Iran** reminded that there has been an ongoing effort to propose and adopt Lahore as the ECO Tourism Capital for 2027. This initiative aims to involve ECO in various tourism projects in Pakistan. The Chair strongly recommended that the House approve the participation of the ECO in the International Tourism Symposium and Expo to pave the way for more events in Pakistan.

44. Considering that the event's objective is in alignment with ECO's tourism development agenda, the **Council** approved the Secretariat's participation in the International Tourism Symposium and Expo in Islamabad, Pakistan, on June 10-11, 2024.

Agenda Item No. 8

Extension of Invitation to Afghanistan to participate at ECOTA Meeting

45. The **Chair** and the Permanent Representative of the Islamic Republic of **Iran** recalled a previous decision allowing Afghanistan to participate in activities if their technical contribution is necessary. This aligns with our earlier decision reported to the CPR, which agreed that Afghanistan's participation should be determined on a case-by-case basis by the CPR, focusing on technical contribution and satisfaction. With the issue under discussion, we seek authorization for the Secretariat to invite Afghanistan to join the ECOTA Cooperation Council Meeting.

46. The Permanent Representative of the Republic of **Tajikistan** noted that during a previous CPR session, the possibility of Afghanistan's participation in technical meetings was discussed. However, the current proposal concerns Afghanistan's participation in the ECOTA Cooperation Council, which involves the ministers of economics of member states. Therefore, Tajikistan, at this time, is not prepared to support Afghanistan's participation in this meeting.

47. The Representative of the Islamic Republic of **Pakistan** emphasized that the discussion on ECOTA does not entail *inviting Afghan ministers/government at official level*. ~~She said that the focus of invitations may be limited to involving technical personnel from the relevant ministries.~~ *As mentioned by the Secretary General in previous meetings,* the intention is ~~to~~ *shall be* to include Afghan technical experts in meetings where their participation is deemed necessary, avoiding broader political implications and focusing solely on specific agenda items where their expertise could contribute, she underscored.

48. Reflecting on Pakistan side's proposal, the **Chair** and the Permanent Representative of the Islamic Republic of **Iran** asked the convenience of Tajikistan towards limiting the Afghanistan's participation to specific segments of the meeting.

49. The Permanent Representative of the Republic of **Tajikistan** reiterated the need to consult with their capital on this matter, emphasizing that they currently lack specific instructions in this regard.

50. The Representative of the Islamic Republic of **Pakistan** expressed their intention to schedule the meeting at the earliest convenience, contingent upon confirmation of participation from the contracting parties.

51. The **ECO Deputy Secretary General (TI & AI)** clarified that ECOTA operates with its own parties and decision-making mechanisms, akin to ECO's general approach. Member states were inclined to align with ECO's meeting protocols but sought guidance from the Council on similar decisions. Reflecting on Tajikistan's stance and Pakistan's suggestion for Afghanistan's participation in technical meetings, he acknowledged the UN's treatment of Afghanistan and proposed granting them participation without decision-making authority due to ECOTA's current fragile state. This approach aims to allow Afghanistan to contribute actively as an observer, facilitating discussion while preserving decision-making among ECOTA's existing parties.

52. The Representative of the Islamic Republic of **Pakistan** suggested that *deliberation may consider* Afghanistan's participation in ECOTA discussions *that may* be limited to non-decision-making roles. ~~She proposed two options~~ *The Chair concluded:* first, authorizing the Secretary-General to conduct technical consultations with Afghanistan, including seeking views from their Prime Minister, ensuring their virtual presence during meetings in Pakistan for presentation and observation. Second, engaging in virtual consultations on specific ECOTA issues, allowing Afghanistan to contribute as an observer. These options aim to clarify Afghanistan's position and facilitate their involvement in ECOTA discussions.

53. With regard to the participation of Afghanistan in the next meeting of the ECOTA Cooperation Council, it was concluded that the views of contracting parties will be obtained before scheduling the date of the said meeting, through a formal communication by ECO Secretariat.

Agenda Item No. 9

Participation at the Third Ministerial Meeting of the Trade Preferential System among the Member States of the OIC Trade Negotiations Committee

54. The **ECO Deputy Secretary General (TI & AI)** briefed that the distinguished Minister of Trade of Turkey extended an invitation to the Secretary General to attend the third ministerial meeting on the preferential trade system of the OIC. Due to a scheduling conflict with another engagement of the Secretary General, the proposal is to authorize the participation of a relevant director and expert from the ECO Secretariat. This decision is based on the shared membership of ECO and OIC, ensuring that discussions on the preferential trading system, including expansion and capacity building, are relevant for ECO colleagues to contribute and gain insights. Additionally, given ECO's own preferential trading system, this meeting offers an opportunity for mutual exchange of information and perspectives on trade facilitation issues. The

participation of ECO is thus deemed beneficial both for contribution and learning purposes.

55. The **Chair** and the Permanent Representative of the Islamic Republic of **Iran** queried whether the ECO is invited to the OIC as an observer?

56. The **ECO Deputy Secretary General (TI & AI)** replied that ECO would participate in the OIC meeting, as observer. The invitation covers participation at both levels, as confirmed by the organizers in Turkey.

57. The **Council** considered and approved the above proposal of the Secretariat, including the expenditures to be incurred on account of return airfare and DSA for two members of staff.

Agenda Item No. 10

Appointment of the new ECO Deputy Secretary General (TC & HRSD)

58. The **Chair** and the Permanent Representative of the Islamic Republic of **Iran** recalled that, during the previous meeting, the Council mandated the nominating countries, Turkmenistan and the Kyrgyz Republic, to engage in consultations and reach a mutually agreeable compromise, thereby avoiding any competition for this position. He invited the delegations from Turkmenistan and the Kyrgyz Republic to inform the Council of the outcomes of their consultations.

59. The Permanent Representative of the **Kyrgyz Republic** stated that no bilateral consultations had been held thus far. He requested the Council's recommendations and welcomed any opinions from the delegation of Turkmenistan to advance this matter.

60. The Representative of **Turkmenistan** expressed full support for the initiative and emphasized the need for a proposal or a relevant verbal note from the Secretariat to forward to their authorities for their response. He noted that receiving feedback from the Secretariat would be beneficial and highlighted the necessity of a formal note to facilitate consultations with the Kyrgyz Republic. He also mentioned that consultations with their headquarters would be required and regretted that he could not provide further information at this time.

61. The **Chair** and the Permanent Representative of the Islamic Republic of **Iran** reiterated that the two nominating countries should first engage in consultations as concluded earlier. He noted that there was no need for an additional report, as the discussions from the last meeting had been incorporated and reflected in the finalized report available for dispatch to the respective capitals. He offered an additional ten days for further consultations, if needed.

62. The Representative of the **Kyrgyz Republic** acknowledged the difficult situation and requested additional time, possibly until the next CPR meeting, to hold further consultations. He emphasized that their nomination was in accordance with the established criteria and practice, including the alphabetical order for the positions of Secretary-General SG and Deputy Secretary-General While there is no written formula for the DSG post, the established practice is understood to apply. He cautioned against deviating from this practice, suggesting it might necessitate discussions on a new

rotation formula and recommended adhering to the accepted general practice. He requested the Secretary to express his views in the matter.

63. The **ECO Secretary General** explained that the appointment against the posts of the Deputy Secretary General is governed by a simple and clear rule stated in Article 6, Paragraph 4, Chapter 3 of the ECO Staff Regulations, which mandates that appointments are made by the Council of Ministers (COM based on the recommendation of the Council of Permanent Representatives (CPR). He noted that while the job description criteria have been previously circulated, the alphabetical rotation principle mentioned by the Kyrgyz Ambassador applies only to the position of the ECO Secretary General, as outlined in Article 6.1, Paragraph 1. This rotation is not fixed but observed as far as possible. He concluded by recommending the continuation of informal consultations as the best option at this stage.

64. The Permanent Representative of the Republic of **Tajikistan** emphasized the importance of electing a new Deputy Secretary General from among the current nominees. He noted the nominations of H.E. Ambassador Turdakun Sydykov from Kyrgyzstan, recognized for his active ambassadorial role, and H.E. Ambassador Silapberdi Nurberdiyev from Turkmenistan, a highly experienced diplomat. With only one position available, he highlighted the previous agreement to conduct consultations facilitated by the Secretariat to reach consensus between the nominating countries. He proposed that the Chair facilitate these consultations to adhere to the organization's consensus-based decision-making process outlined in the staff rules. He suggested specifying in the decision that the other nominee would have priority in the subsequent election for Deputy Secretary General. Additionally, he extended congratulations to Pakistan on the recent election of their candidate as the next ECO Secretary General. He mentioned Tajikistan's support for Pakistan's nomination conveyed through a verbal note to the Secretariat, which, due to a technical issue, was not disseminated to other member states on time.

65. The **Chair** and the Permanent Representative of the Islamic Republic of **Iran** acknowledged his Tajik counterpart's proposal regarding the selection of the next Deputy Secretary General. He, however, expressed confusion over his final point due to the note not being circulated and questioned whether there had been a breach in the two-week silence procedure?

66. The **ECO Secretary General** expressed gratitude for Tajikistan's support regarding the appointment of the new Secretary General. He endorsed the proposal presented by him for appointment of Deputy Secretary General, committing to facilitating informal consultations between Turkmenistan and Kyrgyzstan in the matter. Regarding the issue of non-circulation of Note Verbale, he expressed regret that it had not reached member states as intended. He noted that despite his instructions to the administration section responsible for such distributions, he was unaware of the status of such circulation. He considered this omission a serious oversight, emphasizing that a Note Verbale is a significant document that should be promptly circulated to express support among member states. He apologized for the delay and assured that the Note Verbale would be circulated promptly following the CPR meeting.

67. The **ECO Deputy Secretary General (Admn, EME, IR & IT)** sought permission from the ECO Secretary General and the Chair to clarify the confusion.

68. The **ECO Secretary General** denied permission, while the **Chair** allowed Ambassador Bicakli to speak, questioning the need for permission from himself rather than from the Secretary General.

69. The **ECO Secretary General** raised a point of order, emphasizing that according to current rules; all interventions from the Secretariat must receive prior approval from the Secretary General which was also stressed in a recent office note circulated amongst all directing staff. He expressed concern that altering this rule would impose unnecessary pressure and undermine the Secretary General's mandated authority as outlined in the organization's basic charter and rules. This stance, he reaffirmed, as his official position.

70. Regarding the Note Verbale intended to convey a member state's support for another, the **ECO Secretary General** reiterated that although he had promptly forwarded it to the administration department, it was unfortunately not circulated as per instructions. He expressed regret for this act of negligence on behalf of the administration and considered the issue closed. He assured the Council that the Note Verbale would be circulated later in the day and requested that further discussion on this matter be discontinued.

71. The **ECO Deputy Secretary General (Admn, EME, IR & IT)** asserted that there is significant criticism directed at the administration, which he deemed necessary to address. He insisted on having the opportunity to speak and clarify the matter in the presence of His Excellency the Secretary General and the Ambassador of Tajikistan, who raised the concerns. Stressing the administration's right to defend itself transparently, he emphasized the need for clarity and full explanation of the issues at hand in this forum.

72. The **Chair** and the Permanent Representative of the Islamic Republic of **Iran** granted permission to Ambassador Bicakli, stating, "Please proceed. We are listening to you."

73. The **ECO Deputy Secretary General (Admn, EME, IR & IT)** clarified that the Note Verbale mentioned by Ambassador of Tajikistan, purportedly dated May 16th, was actually sent via fax to the Secretariat on May 19, 2024, as evidenced by official records. He explained that during this period, he was on a mission in Turkmenistan, and the Note Verbale drafting commenced in his absence under the Head of Section for Administration. Upon returning to the Secretariat on May, he found the silence procedure for appointing the new Secretary General had already concluded, making the Note Verbale on this issue redundant. Based on Tajikistan's lack of objections during the silence procedure, he inferred their tacit support for the appointment, leading him to deem further circulation of the Note Verbale to member states unnecessary and illogical.

74. The **ECO Secretary General** expressed disappointment with the Chair's decision, feeling it undermined authority of this privileged position, overseeing the ECO's operational and organizational command. He noted there was initial reluctance to allow his subordinate to speak, despite eventually being permitted. He was particularly

troubled by the characterization of his instructions as illogical, emphasizing that clear directives are crucial for maintaining order and efficiency within the organization.

75. Regarding a draft Note Verbale prepared by the administration office, the **ECO Secretary General** highlighted its significance in symbolizing positive gestures between member states. However, he expressed concern that this communication was not circulated after the two-week silence period ended, which he believed was important for maintaining transparency and diplomatic courtesy among member countries. He stressed that instructions issued by the Secretary General are intended for implementation without questioning their rationale, underscoring the importance of procedural adherence to uphold the integrity and smooth functioning of the organization.

76. The **ECO Deputy Secretary General (Admn, EME, IR & IT)** explained that, in his capacity as Deputy Secretary General for Administration, he did not receive any direct instructions from the Secretary General. He emphasized that there were no instructions from the Secretary General visible in his inbox pertaining to administrative matters.

77. The **Chair** and the Permanent Representative of the Islamic Republic of **Iran** elucidated that this is an internal matter that should not be discussed here. I believe you have explained what occurred, the Chair noted, adding that the crucial point is that Pakistan is aware of Tajikistan's endorsement of the new Secretary General's candidacy. This issue arose due to a technical problem where the note was not circulated as intended. There is no intention to assign blame. It is essential for the Secretariat to maintain consistency in its operations, as we observe variations in the speed of note circulation, he mentioned. This internal issue needs to be managed appropriately. It is important that all parties, especially Pakistan, are informed that Tajikistan has formally supported the candidacy, the Chair stated.

78. ~~The Representative of the Islamic Republic of **Pakistan** expressed gratitude for the support received regarding their nomination for Secretary General Position. Emphasizing that this position carries substantial authority defined by the ECO charter and staff regulations developed through consensus among member states, she underscored that the Secretary General's role transcends individual personalities. She urged that the Secretariat's internal issues should not be discussed here, suggesting such matters to be resolved inside the administrative arrangement of the Organization. She highlighted the importance of professionalism within the organization, expressing concern that airing administrative issues could reflect poorly on all involved, given the seniority and experience of the ambassadors present. She emphasized the need to uphold the organization's integrity, stressing that all participants should contribute to a law-abiding and respectful environment. She noted that the Secretary General from Pakistan would also be pleased to know that all here are to uphold a framework of adherence to laws, rather than posing unnecessary challenges to each other. The Permanent Representative of the Republic of **Azerbaijan** highlighted the need to consider alphabetical order for nominations, as suggested by the Ambassador of Tajikistan, while acknowledging the clarity of regulations and modalities for the Secretary General compared to the Deputy Secretary General positions. He proposed addressing this discrepancy for future cases to prevent similar challenges. Additionally, he raised concerns about unresolved issues encountered during the meeting, including~~

those related to the Secretary. He also posed a question about the procedure if consultations fail to result in a renewed nomination, emphasizing the necessity of addressing these gaps in staff regulations for future reference.

79. The **Chair** and the Permanent Representative of the Islamic Republic of **Iran** posed a significant question about the next steps if consensus was not reached between the two nominating countries. He acknowledged the proposal from the Ambassador of Tajikistan to conduct consultations, emphasizing that these should not be limited solely to the two countries involved. He suggested documenting the Council's invitation for the Kyrgyz Republic and Turkmenistan to engage in consultations to agree on a single candidate for the Deputy Secretary General position. He opined that consultations should occur within the capitals of the respective countries rather than in Tehran, where no decision-making authority on this issue exists. He underscored the role of the Chair or Secretary General in facilitating these consultations. The Chair invited further proposals and expressed openness to additional suggestions, aiming to include agreed-upon measures in the meeting's report and hoping for progress by the next Council of Permanent Representatives (CPR) meeting.

80. The Permanent Representative of the Republic of **Kazakhstan** expressed that the issue at hand is quite challenging, noting that their delegation is awaiting further clarification. He suggested involving the Secretary General and the Chair to facilitate coordination between the Kyrgyz and Turkmen delegations, expressing hope for their agreement, along with the assistance of their Tajik counterpart.

81. The Permanent Representative of the **Kyrgyz** Republic expressed satisfaction with the Chair's proposal and aligned with the views put forth by Ambassadors of Tajikistan, Kazakhstan and others. Referring to Azerbaijan's viewpoint, he highlighted the need to address such issues systematically. He reiterated his previous position on the established practice, emphasizing that while there is no written document on the alphabetical order of Deputy Secretaries General, it has been customary as seen with Afghanistan, Azerbaijan and Kazakhstan. He questioned whether there is a need to discuss or establish a new rotation formula or practice if the current one isn't upheld. He stressed the importance of clarity on whether to follow established practice or create new one.

82. *The Representative of the Islamic Republic of **Pakistan** expressed gratitude for the support received regarding their nomination for Secretary General Position. Emphasizing that this position carries substantial authority defined by the ECO charter and staff regulations developed through consensus among member states, she underscored that the Secretary General's role transcends individual personalities. She urged that the Secretariat's internal issues should not be discussed here, suggesting such matters to be resolved inside the administrative arrangement of the Organization. She highlighted the importance of professionalism within the organization, expressing concern that airing administrative issues could reflect poorly on all involved, given the seniority and experience of the ambassadors present. She emphasized the need to uphold the organization's integrity, stressing that all participants should contribute to a law-abiding and respectful environment. She noted that the Secretary General from Pakistan would also be pleased to know that all here are to uphold a framework of adherence to laws, rather than posing unnecessary challenges to each other.*

83. The **Chair** and the Permanent Representative of the Islamic Republic of **Iran** acknowledged the complexities surrounding the current selection of Deputy Secretary General, noting persistent disagreement among interested parties regarding a selection formula. However, he suggested leveraging this experience to develop a formula or modality for future DSG selections and proposed placing it on the organization's agenda. Given the limited time remaining and divergent interests among members, he expressed caution about devising agreed-upon criteria at this juncture. The Chair invited further discussion on whether to incorporate these considerations into the report.

84. The **ECO Secretary General** clarified that August 13, 2024 is not the definitive deadline for deciding on the appointment of the new Deputy Secretary General. Expressing optimism for reaching an agreement by that time, he acknowledged that if consensus is not achieved, consultations will need to continue. Consequently, the Deputy Secretary General position will remain vacant until a decision is made, he concluded.

85. The Representative of the Islamic Republic of **Pakistan** proposed referring the issue to the ECO Reform Committee and, if necessary, to the upcoming Deputy Foreign Ministers (DFMs) meeting for definitive resolution. Emphasizing the importance of addressing future perspectives, particularly with ECO Reforms on the agenda of the next High-Level Committee of DFMs, she suggested parallel negotiations between the concerned parties. This approach aims to prevent similar situations from arising in the future through proactive engagement and discussion.

86. The **Chair** and the Permanent Representative of the Islamic Republic of **Iran** noted consensus amongst delegations to again invite the two nominating countries to conduct consultations aimed at finalizing a single candidate for the upcoming vacancy of the Deputy Secretary General. Should the need arise, the Chair may facilitate these consultations, he added. The outcomes will be presented at the next CPR meeting for further deliberation, with the goal of reaching a decision by August 12, 2024, he concluded.

Agenda Item No. 11

Administrative and budgetary matters:

- Reallocation of ECO Budget of 2024

87. The **ECO Secretary General** informed that, as agreed during the previous session, the Secretariat is actively developing an implementation formula for the new salary scale of Iranian Category-III Staff. This is being crafted to ensure full compliance with local regulations regarding mandatory Social Security deductions for Iranian nationals, while also aligning with all relevant ECO documents, rules and regulations. The Secretary General anticipated the completion of this task within a few days, after which the same will be circulated among ECO Member States for review and feedback. He invited Council members to share any comments or concerns they may have on this matter with the Secretariat.

88. The **Chair** and the Permanent Representative of the Islamic Republic of **Iran** sought clarification: "Is this the new proposal?"

89. The **ECO Secretary General** reiterated that the Secretariat is currently developing an implementation scheme for the new salary scales initiated by the Iranian Ministry of Foreign Affairs for Iranian Category-III Staff. The scheme aims to ensure compliance with mandatory local Social Security deductions for Iranian nationals as required by local regulations, while also aligning with relevant ECO documents, rules and regulations approved by the organization.

90. The **Chair** and the Permanent Representative of the Islamic Republic of **Iran** queried, "who gave you this mandate?" emphasizing that this is the decision of the Council of Ministers. This not a DSG that you can prevent.

91. The **ECO Secretary General** emphasized the imperative of adhering to both mandatory local Social Security deductions for Iranian nationals, as proposed by the Iranian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and the organization's rules and regulations. Stressing the role of Secretary General as the Chief Administrative Officer, he categorically mentioned his implementation mandate on the decision (s) in line with Article 30.2, Chapter IX of the ECO Staff Regulations as per date designated by the COM. Stressing the Secretary General's responsibility to implement decisions made by the Council of Ministers within specified timeline or otherwise, he underscored his commitment to upholding the Treaty of Izmir and relevant regulations without the need for additional mandates. He expressed concern over significant oversights and ambiguous citation of local rules by the Working Group, without any particular reference to their relevancy to International Organizations, and its failure to adhere to ECO's established protocols in the proposed salary structure, emphasizing the importance of maintaining organizational integrity.

92. The **Chair** and the Permanent Representative of the Islamic Republic of **Iran** emphasized the current situation involving the decision made by the Council of Ministers, stating that it is now your mandate to implement it. He underscored that the deadline for implementation is set for the end of June, with a specific offer for consultation with the host country to ensure proper execution. He clarified that this is no longer merely an Iranian proposal but a decision endorsed by the Council of Ministers. He emphasized that ECO is an organization composed of ten sovereign states, not a company, and therefore, its highest authority is the Council of Ministers, not an individual acting as a CEO. The Chair highlighted that the Council's decision cannot be challenged based on alleged misleading of the Ministers, noting that this contradicts previous assertions requiring centralized permission.

93. The **Chair** and the Permanent Representative of the Islamic Republic of **Iran** reiterated that the decision was agreed upon through a two-week silence procedure and should have been implemented immediately thereafter. Although additional time was requested and subsequently granted until June 30 during the last CPR meeting, the Chair made it clear that the decision must be executed without further delay. He asserted that there is no alternative scheme to consider; the decision has already been made and must be followed. He also pointed out that the current Secretary General will soon be leaving, and any deviations from implementation, such as extra payments or lack of adherence to the decision, would lead to accountability issues. The new Secretary General should not have to start his tenure dealing with the consequences of non-implementation or parallel challenges. He stressed the importance of adhering to

the Council of Ministers' decision, which incorporates the Iranian proposal and has been formally endorsed, adding that the mandate is clear and the implementation must proceed as directed.

94. The Representative of the Islamic Republic of **Pakistan** underlined that the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Pakistan had supported the Iranian proposal in good faith. She recalled that Pakistan Embassy's Note Verbale of March 19, 2024 remains unanswered as yet. She emphasized the need to adhere strictly to the ECO Charter and Staff Regulations, specifically citing Article 31 and Article 23, ~~which require Council of Ministers' approval for any amendments to the regulations, proposed either by a Member States or ECO Secretary General, upon the recommendation of the CPR. She noted that the proposal from Iran had unresolved issues and calculations, particularly concerning the budget, which is prepared and paid in dollars, highlighting the significant disparity between the local currency exchange rate in the open market and the bank rate. She stressed the need for a calculation that satisfies all Member States.~~

95. ~~In addition, the Representative of the Islamic Republic of **Pakistan** pointed out that the matter is currently in the local court, which changes the context since the Council of Ministers' decision was made before the court's involvement. She questioned the legal implications of this situation, referencing that in Pakistan, court cases typically halt implementation unless instructed otherwise by the court. She requested clarity on two points: the unanswered queries requested by Pakistan through Embassy's Note Verbale of March 19, and the Secretariat's future course of action given the ongoing court case. She expressed concern about any additional financial liability for the incoming Secretary General.~~

96. The **Chair** and the Permanent Representative of the Islamic Republic of **Iran** asked the Representative of Pakistan *and all other members of the meeting* if *she they* had any doubt that this was a COM decision?

97. ~~The Representative of the Islamic Republic of **Pakistan** acknowledged that there is a decision by the Council of Ministers with which they agree in principle. She clarified that there is not opposition to the proposed amendment or recommendation, but there are specific requirements that need to be addressed. She requested further elaboration to relay this information accurately to her Capital, emphasizing that this matter is not about an individual perspective but about the legal position, especially considering the issue is currently in court.~~

98. The **ECO Secretary General** began by expressing regret over being interrupted by the Chair, and emphasized his role as the chief administrative officer of the organization, as stated in Article 9 of the ECO Regulations. He reiterated his responsibility and answerability to the Council of Ministers for all organizational activities, asserting the importance of allowing him to voice his concerns regarding the implementation of decisions. Concerning the issue of salary payments, he clarified that despite the report suggesting local currency payments to Category-III Iranian Staff, the Secretariat would continue to make payments in USD to maintain transparency and avoid budgetary complications from exchange rate conversions, in line with Article 11 of the Treaty of Izmir. He highlighted discrepancies in the salary structure format presented in the working group report, noting that it followed a local company format.

He insisted on revising the table to include necessary columns for child allowance, increment, conveyance allowance and house allowance, while omitting columns for overtime and other legal payments.

99. The **ECO Secretary General** pointed out the omission of increments in the report, emphasizing that increments are the staff's acquired right that they earn in years, and should remain intact and be included in their salaries separately from other payments. He also emphasized for correcting errors in the insurance premiums column, stressing the need for accurate calculations based on gross salary to comply with social security regulations. He cited Chapter 4, Article 11 of the staff regulations, which allows for periodic review of staff's salary scales upon the recommendation of the Secretary General, a step overlooked during the decision-making process. He expressed concern that disregarding the authority of the Secretary General enshrined in the founding documents and regulations would harm the organization's integrity and future operations.

100. The **ECO Secretary General** noted that the working group's report, which aimed to comply with social security regulations, unfairly proposed the reduction in the staff salaries without any justification. He stressed that this creates discrimination based on nationality, as staff in Category-III performing the same job would receive different salaries. He reiterated the need for a fair implementation of decisions. He reminded the Council of the decision made at the 25th COM meeting in November 2021, which approved salary increases for all Secretariat staff, including category-III Iranian staff. If the question is to anyhow implement the decision, he emphasized that this decision remains in force and should also be implemented to avoid future embarrassment and double standards. Finally, he reassured the Council that the Secretariat is developing a recommendation that aligns with internal and local regulations, particularly addressing the concerns of one-member state regarding the alignment between social security and salary amounts. He requested the Council to honour the unanimously agreed regulations and ensure their observance in letter and spirit, without satisfying the personal pleasure or displeasure of anyone.

101. The **Chair** and the Permanent Representative of the Islamic Republic of **Iran** expressed gratitude and acknowledged the translators' exhaustion, requesting them to ensure precise translation of his remarks. He reminded everyone of their collective involvement in the initial discussions on the issue at hand.

102. The Permanent Representative of the Republic of **Tajikistan** reiterated the Secretary General's statement regarding the Council of Ministers' decision, highlighting the Secretariat's ongoing efforts to devise a new salary scheme for Iranian nationals in Category-II. He emphasized the importance of aligning with both local social security requirements and internal ECO legal documents, which are stipulated in the organization's staff regulations. While acknowledging the Chair's authorization for new discussions, he underscored the necessity of adhering to internal procedures and the host country's social security requirements. He stressed the need to strike a balance between these factors to ensure the Secretariat can develop a logical and equitable salary scale. This scale should consider the interests and regulations of Iran, as well as those of the organization, he added.

103. Expressing disappointment at recent tensions, the Permanent Representative of the Republic of **Tajikistan** highlighted his six years of experience and the unprecedented strain on the Secretary General's position. He proposed concluding current discussions without further delay, with the understanding that a special commission would address any lingering issues. He stressed the significance of devising a scheme that Iranian authorities find acceptable and that aligns with organizational regulations, emphasizing the need for respectful dialogue throughout the process.

104. The **Chair** and the Permanent Representative of the Islamic Republic of **Iran** emphasized the Council of Ministers' decision, stating, "The decision by the Council of Ministers is the decision by the Council of Ministers. We must adhere strictly to it. Can someone read it aloud, he requested?"

105. The **ECO Legal Advisor** read out a Note Verbale dated April 8, 2024, whereby the ECO Secretariat informed the member states about the approval of the 286th meeting of the Council of Permanent Representatives, held on April 8, 2024. This approval endorsed the recommendation from the second working group meeting on ECO reforms, held on March 17, 2024, concerning the Iranian proposal. These measures are intended to seek approval from the ECO Council of Ministers for amending the staff regulations and revising the salary structure for Iranian Category-III Staff categories. According to the Note Verbale, unless objections arise, the amendment to the ECO staff regulations will proceed as adopted.

106. The **Chair** and the Permanent Representative of the Islamic Republic of **Iran** also referred to a decision of 287th Meeting of CPR, and read out the relevant para of its report regarding the subject issue that states: "*after careful consideration of the discussions, the Council authorized the Secretariat to reallocate the necessary chapters of the budget 2024 needed for implementation of the decision on approval of Iran's proposed amendments to the staff regulations, including the revised salary structure in respect of Iranian Category-III. The Council also tasked the Secretariat to conduct consultations and coordination with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Iran, if required, to ensure implementation of the Council of Ministers' decision not later than 30 June 2024.*"

107. The **Chair** and the Permanent Representative of the Islamic Republic of **Iran** made it clear that there is no room for interpretation on this matter. He affirmed that there was no dispute regarding the Secretary General's authority, emphasizing that the decision in question was mandated by the Council of Ministers. He stressed that the Secretariat cannot propose an alternative to the Council's decision. With the end of June approaching, the Chair noted the Secretary General's indication of developing a new proposal, which would necessitate another approval from the Council of Ministers. He underscored the validity of the Council's decision and emphasized the imperative of its implementation. Addressing the situation, he suggested that any further discussions or alternative proposals should be coordinated with the host country but reiterated that implementation of the COM decision must commence by the end of June. The Chair urged for simplicity in handling the matter, highlighting that the decision and the extension of its implementation deadline from April to the end of June were clearly communicated previously. As of June 5th, he noted again the ongoing development of new initiatives.

108. The **ECO Secretary General** requested the Chair not to interrupt him, emphasizing the Secretariat's readiness to commence implementation of the Council of Ministers' decision effective July 1, 2024. He pointed out significant omissions and inaccuracies in the current proposal, highlighting discrepancies in the table structure compared to the Secretariat's standard format. He clarified that the decision was based on an informational report from the second working group rather than a finalized recommendation or draft decision. Reflecting on previous decisions, he recalled the unanimous approval during the 25th Council of Permanent Representatives (CPR) in Ashgabat for salary increase across all ECO staff categories, including Category-III. Expressing concern over recent shifts in approach, he questioned the consistency in organizational decisions. Despite the intent to align social security contributions with the salaries of Category-III Iranian nationals, he stressed the importance of maintaining uniformity across the Secretariat's salary structure.

109. Looking ahead, the **ECO Secretary General** indicated a potential need to submit a detailed report to the Council of Ministers for guidance, citing ongoing pressures and following the unresolved communications from the Embassy of Pakistan that raised valid queries which still remained unanswered. He acknowledged constructive proposals from delegates while advocating to expedite discussions. He assured the Council that an implementation scheme, integrating member state concerns and adhering to ECO regulations, would be finalized shortly and circulated for member feedback. In conclusion, he underscored the Secretary General's role in decision-making processes outlined in the organization's staff regulations, emphasizing the need for mutual respect among stakeholders. If pressures continue, he reiterated his last resort to compile and submit a detailed report to the Council of Ministers to clarify the Secretariat's position and seek guidance in the matter. However, he reaffirmed the Secretariat's commitment to transparent and comprehensive communication with all stakeholders, stressing the importance of constructive engagement as the implementation deadline approaches.

110. The **Chair** and the Permanent Representative of the Islamic Republic of **Iran** sought clarification from the Legal Advisor regarding the Secretary General's role in recommendations. He noted that the presence of Secretariat members in the working group and highlighted the Secretary General's involvement alongside representatives from Pakistan and other member states in the decision-making process. Addressing concerns about the implementation of 25th COM decision, he questioned that the Secretary General, instead of criticizing them, should have executed the 25th Council of Ministers' decision. He pointed out the Secretary General's tenure since 2021 and the responsibility associated with the role, highlighting the implications of delaying the implementation of the decision of the COM.

111. The **ECO Legal Advisor** explained that periodic salary reviews can be made at the recommendation of the Secretary General. Iran's request to amend the staff regulations, including the salary table, is valid under Article 31, which allows amendments upon any member state's request, he said.

112. The Permanent Representative of the Republic of **Azerbaijan** acknowledged the presence of contradictory views among member states and emphasized the importance of mutual respect and adherence to the organization's rules and regulations. He highlighted the necessity of observing the organization's charter, noting that a previous

COM decision had approved an increase in the salaries of category A staff, which was recommended by the CPR and subsequently approved by COM. He stressed that the Secretariat and all colleagues are responsible for these issues and that recommendations should be considered timely and reported to the CPR. He underscored the importance of thorough preliminary review of the matters before submission to COM given that the Ministers approve proposals without making detailed consideration.

113. The Permanent Representative of the Republic of **Azerbaijan** proposed that instead of focusing immediate attention on the issue, they should use the time available until July 1, 2024 to reach a consensus. He pointed out a contradiction between the decisions of the 25th COM meeting, where one decision proposed increasing Category-III staff salaries and another suggested decreasing them. He called for clarification on this matter without contradicting COM decisions, which must be implemented. He urged the Secretariat to consider all matters properly according to the organization's rules and regulations and to report any contradictions to the CPR, adding that this approach would enable more thorough consideration before presenting issues to the honourable ministers. He concluded by advocating for a common view and proper reporting to ministers in future cases.

114. The Representative of the Islamic Republic of **Pakistan** *while abetting the Permanent Representatives' comments*, acknowledged that *everyone agrees with there is a decision* by the Council of Ministers ~~with which they agree~~ in principle. She clarified that there is not opposition to the proposed amendment or recommendation, but there are specific requirements that need to be addressed. She requested further elaboration to relay this information accurately to her Capital, emphasizing that this matter is not about an individual perspective but about the legal position, especially considering the issue is currently in court.

115. ~~The Representative of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan~~ *She* expressed appreciation for the views put forward by Azerbaijani side, ~~and emphasized that no one, including herself, opposes the decisions made by the COM.~~ She highlighted that the role of the CPR is to provide recommendations to the COM, which relies on CPR's input, stressing that any difficulties or discrepancies in implementation should be addressed by the technical teams and the members of CPRs, not by the foreign ministers, as the responsibility lies with those present at such meetings which make recommendations to the COM. She reiterated the need to address discrepancies identified by the Secretary General, in accordance with the ECO charter and regulations, and pointed out that the Legal Advisor had mentioned Articles from ECO Staff Regulations that entitle by both the Member States and the Secretary General to propose any amendments in the regulations.

116. Regarding the Report of the Second Working Group Meeting, the Representative of the Islamic Republic of **Pakistan** noted that her country neither gave consent thereon the document nor attended that meeting. Although the Pakistan's Permanent Representative consented to the proposal in goodwill upon the personal request made by Permanent Representative of Iran, it should be noted that Pakistan side did not participate in the Second Working Group Meeting. This has led to issues being observed by her ministry, as the matter was handled swiftly amidst sudden and unexpected developments. She cautioned that the matter is currently in the Court, which could lead to an embarrassing situation for all. She urged careful deliberation to

ensure compliance with ECO regulations and local laws to avoid any potential court fines. To this end, she shared an example from the Pakistan Embassy School in Tehran, where Court orders resulted in significant financial losses to the Embassy due to imposition of penalties by the Court. With this in mind, she illustrated the sensitivity of Court matters and the tendency of the Courts to mostly favor the employees over employers.

117. The **ECO Deputy Secretary General (Admn, EME, IR & IT)** explained that the Second Working Group was established by the CPR upon the request of Member States. The Working Group's role was to make recommendations, not decisions, and these recommendations did not necessarily require consensus. He represented the Secretariat, along with his assistant, the head of section, the chief accountant, the legal advisor, along with participation by representatives from some Member States. At the end of the committee meeting, a report was prepared and unanimously approved by CPR. The issues were further discussed in a subsequent CPR meeting.

118. The **ECO Deputy Secretary General (Admn, EME, IR & IT)** acknowledged that the issue was very serious and sensitive. The Secretariat should have taken measures from the beginning and considered all possibilities. Before establishing the working group, it was proposed to form an internal committee within the Secretariat, but this committee was not established. Recent decisions and revisions were made directly by the Secretary General without consulting the DSG Admin, who is responsible for these issues, or the other DSGs. Previously, the Secretary General would consult with other DSGs before making important decisions, but this consultation did not occur, nor was the Legal Advisor consulted. He also noted that in the last CPR decision, the CPR advised the Secretariat to work with, consult and coordinate with the host country. However, this consultation with the host country did not take place.

119. The **ECO Secretary General** questioned whether the meeting was turning into a court to accuse him. He asked if scenes were being created to blame him for everything by the Chair, including by his subordinate DSG. He challenged the notion that rules were being broken and requested all representatives to intervene, citing a clear violation of the rules. He emphasized that the accusations were false and urged the meeting to maintain order and respect proper procedures.

120. The **Chair** and the Permanent Representative of the Islamic Republic of **Iran** asked the Deputy Secretary General about his role as the In-Charge of Administration.

121. The **ECO Deputy Secretary General (Admn, EME, IR & IT)** stated that his role encompasses directing, advising on regulations, providing explanations, clarifying matters and ensuring proper management. He questioned the timing of the current discussion, highlighting its interesting nature. He queried why the Secretary General is bringing up new issues and remarks now, rather than addressing them earlier, including in the recent two or three years.

122. In addition, the **ECO Deputy Secretary General (Admn, EME, IR & IT)** highlighted the Secretariat's longstanding practice of adhering to the laws of the host country, which is a fundamental principle of international law. Specifically, he referenced legal documents pertinent to Iran, including Article 67 of the Diplomatic Relations of the Islamic Republic of Iran, which governs the employment and

termination of local staff in resident missions and servant diplomats. He also mentioned the Diplomatic Guide and Directions published by Iran's Ministry of Foreign Affairs, emphasizing that these documents are legally binding. According to Article 7 of these regulations, Iranian labor law holds precedence as imperative law, which all diplomatic missions within Iran must comply with. The DSG noted that historically, the Secretariat has consistently applied Iranian laws, including labor and social security laws, particularly in matters concerning local staff.

123. The Permanent Representative of the Republic of **Tajikistan** proposed to conclude the current agenda item and allow the Secretariat to prepare a new salary scale. Emphasizing unanimous support for implementing COM decisions, he stated that clarity on implementation would arise with the new salary scale. He urged the Secretariat to justify any rejections or oppositions to movements on the new scale, particularly from the Iranian side. Highlighting the absence of a new scale currently under discussion, he expressed reluctance to participate in what he viewed as a legal process. Instead, he emphasized his role in making decisions to resolve organizational issues as a representative of Tajikistan. He reiterated his proposal to conclude the current agenda item and proceed to the next, requesting consideration of member states' proposals.

124. The Representative of the Islamic Republic of **Pakistani** reiterated that discussions concerning internal administrative matters related to the Secretary General should not be addressed in this forum. She emphasized the need for improved communication amidst ongoing debates, suggesting that any administrative concerns should be addressed within the Secretariat's internal business. She urged maintaining decorum and avoiding heated debates or exchanges of such nature of views during CPR proceedings. She requested that this stance be accurately documented in the report to reflect their position. She encouraged avoiding unnecessary confrontations that may lead to mutual embarrassment.

125. The **ECO Deputy Secretary General (TI & AI)** emphasized the deep respect held for the Secretary General by all present, highlighting the fundamental role of the Secretariat staff as servants employed by the Member States, with the Secretary General as their head. He underscored the importance of including the Secretariat's inputs to ensure comprehensive and specialized views in decision-making processes. He noted concerns about discussions on legal and accounting matters without consulting relevant experts within the Secretariat. He suggested that there may be a communication gap hindering the representation of their views effectively. Drawing on his experience in international bodies, he emphasized the principle that the Secretariat serves at the discretion of Member States. He questioned why alleged deficiencies in decisions were not addressed earlier in the approval process or during the silence procedure.

~~126. The Representative of the Islamic Republic of **Pakistan** expressed regret in taking the floor again and reiterated concerns about inclusivity, referencing Pakistan Embassy's Note Verbale dated 19 March 2024, which has yet to receive a response. She noted that the reasons for the silence on Pakistan's queries remain unclear. Additionally, she emphasized the need to address internal matters within the ECO Secretariat rather than bringing them to the attention of Member States in this manner.~~

127. The **ECO Deputy Secretary General (TI & AI)** urged a balanced and non-emotional approach to decision-making, respecting ministerial decisions while advocating for thorough coordination and consultation, particularly with Iran as stipulated, by upcoming deadlines. He reassured the availability of the legal advisor to address any legal inquiries. He concluded with a respectful request to extend the Secretariat's timeline until the end of June for proper coordination and consultation.

128. The **Chair and the Permanent Representative of the Islamic Republic of Iran** emphasized the COM decision and the CPR deadline for implementing it by the end of June. Stressing the importance of possible consultation with the host country, the Chair underscored that the decision must be fully executed by 30 June.

129. The Representative of the Islamic Republic of **Pakistan** expressed regret in taking the floor again and reiterated concerns about inclusivity, referencing Pakistan Embassy's Note Verbale dated 19 March 2024, which has yet to receive a response. She noted that the reasons for the silence on Pakistan's queries remain unclear. Additionally, she emphasized the need to address internal matters within the ECO Secretariat rather than bringing them to the attention of Member States in this manner.

130. ~~The Representative of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan~~ *She* raised significant concerns regarding the issues highlighted by the Secretary General and the subsequent counter-arguments from his team. She expressed uncertainty about the authority of the Deputy Secretaries General, emphasizing that, to her understanding and knowledge, all legal and binding documents of the ECO clearly delineate the authority of the Member States and the Secretary General. She strongly recommended that the Secretary General issue a Note Verbale to detail his concerns, allowing these to be communicated to their respective capitals for appropriate instructions. She argued that this approach would be more efficient than engaging in prolonged discussions within the CPR. She underscored that, according to ECO Rules and Regulations, the implementation of COM decisions is the direct responsibility of the Secretary General by the date designated by the COM or otherwise.

131. The **Chair** and the Permanent Representative of the Islamic Republic of **Iran** concluded that there is a decision by the Council of Ministers (COM) and a corresponding decision by the Council of Permanent Representatives (CPR) to implement the COM decision by 30 June. He noted that if consultation with the host country is necessary, it should take place now, as it seems required. He further mentioned that there will be no CPR meeting before 30 June, so the consultation must occur between the Secretariat and the host country. Speaking on behalf of his own country, not as the Chair, he stated that the host country is open to any informal consultation to facilitate the implementation of the COM decision, which was made through the silence procedure.

- Consideration of possibility Reallocation of funds in condition of being adequate cash at the end of the year between the Chapters of ECO budget 2024 without creation of increase in the total size of budget for Medical Reimbursement

132. The **ECO Chief Accountant** explained that the medical expenses for one of the staff members have exceeded a third of the allocated budget for 2024, despite there being more than 45 staff members. Considering the inflation rate for medical treatment in the country, the Secretariat cannot afford to cover this amount. Therefore, they will only be able to pay the actual costs, especially since the staff member's tenure is ending soon. To manage this situation, the Secretariat needs the authorization of the CPR by the end of the year. This would involve adjusting some allocated budget chapters if there is enough cash available. If possible, the Secretariat would then be able to pay the remaining dollar portion of these expenses to the staff member.

133. The **Council** authorized the Secretariat for making necessary transfer of fund between the relevant budget chapters to meet the remaining portion of the expenses to the concerned staff.

- Recommendations of the Selection Panel

134. Clarifying that her query is not about the selection panel, the Representative of the Islamic Republic of **Pakistan** inquired about the circulation of vacancies, specifically the post of Head of Section for Administration which will fall vacant soon. She reminded that it was recognized by 285th CPR Meeting in Yazd that all posts should be circulated 3 to 4 months before the incumbent staff's tenure ended. She requested the reason for the delay and the non-circulation of the posts within the agreed timeframe.

135. The **Chair** and the Permanent Representative of the Islamic Republic of **Iran** inquired why the procedure was not followed by the Secretariat?

136. In response to the Chair's inquiry, the **ECO Secretary General** stated that the question should be addressed to him, emphasizing that he is still in charge of the organization and requested patience as his tenure has only two months remaining. He expressed regret that despite both oral and written instructions to circulate the Note Verbale, these directives were disregarded by the administration. He admitted he did not know why the instructions were not followed or where the failure occurred, but insisted the directives were given in a timely manner. Due to the non-implementation, the Secretary General issued an internal memo to the relevant staff member demanding justification for the failure to follow his instructions.

137. The **ECO Deputy Secretary General (Admn, EME, IR & IT)** explained that during the CPR meeting in Yazd, the issue was discussed but no final decision or position was recorded in the CPR report. He reminded the Chair that he had raised a request on behalf of the Secretariat, under the Secretary General's instruction, to establish a specific period for announcing vacant positions. He added that the Chair, representing Iran, stated that there was no need to specify a timeframe for announcing vacancies, noting that member states should already be aware of the tenures end dates for their respective staff members. Consequently, it was deemed unnecessary to set specific periods for P category positions. However, for SG and DSG positions, the August Council had stipulated a timeframe of 3 to 4 months, as mentioned by the distinguished representative of Iran. No decision was made at the Yazd meeting regarding vacancy announcements for Directors and Program Officers, as a result, the Secretary General's section was implemented and communicated to the member states.

138. The **ECO Deputy Secretary General (Admn, EME, IR & IT)** took this opportunity to inform the Council that the office term of the Head of Section for Administration would end on July 10, 2024. He noted that there would likely be no CPR meeting before that date. If a meeting were to occur before July 10, the issue could be addressed then; otherwise, it should be resolved now, he stated. The host country had sent a Note Verbale to the Secretariat, which was circulated to member states in a timely manner. The host country requested an extension of the tenure of Head of Section for Administration until his successor arrived. Given that there would not be a COM meeting during this period, the Deputy Secretary General humbly suggested that the CPR make a decision regarding the extension of the Head of Section Administration through a 14-day silence procedure.

139. The Representative of the Islamic Republic of **Pakistan** recalled that the report of the 285th CPR meeting explicitly acknowledged the practice of circulating Category-I and II posts 3 to 4 months before the incumbent staff complete their tenures. She emphasized that both directing and professional staff fall within this recognized criterion for vacancy circulation. She also noted that the CPR agenda is circulated two weeks before the meeting, and the item proposed by the distinguished DSG was not included in the circulated agenda. Therefore, she proposed deferring any decision regarding the recent extension request until the next CPR meeting, in accordance with the provisions for CPR business and the inclusion of any item in its agenda, which requires 14 days' notice before the meeting.

140. The **ECO Secretary General** expressed regret over uninformed remarks made by the Deputy Secretary General (DSG), who is in charge of administration. He emphasized that the DSG should be well-versed in the established practices, rules and regulations of the Organization with their better understanding than anyone else. Referencing the report from the 285th meeting of the Council of Permanent Representatives (CPR) in Yazd, he stated that the meeting recognized and reaffirmed the established practice of announcing vacancies for Category-I and II positions three to four months before the current officeholders' service tenures end.

141. Addressing a question from the representative of Pakistan, **ECO Secretary General** reiterated that he had instructed the administration section multiple times through his Chef de Cabinet followed by a formal communication that questioned such a negligence for not circulating the post, but all those instructions were ignored without any logical justification. He stated that the DSG's understanding that there was no need to circulate such posts if the staff's tenure is ending, is not a valid excuse for not implementing the Secretary General's instructions. In addition, he recalled that he did not authorize his deputy to raise this issue during the meeting but to his surprise, the DSG took the floor without the Secretary General's prior consent.

142. The **ECO Deputy Secretary General (Admn, EME, IR & IT)** confronted the ECO Secretary General, demanding why the matter was not discussed with him. He expressed astonishment and frustration over the Secretary General's failure to consult with him or other colleagues.

143. The **ECO Secretary General** reiterated that the DSG was not authorized to discuss this issue during the meeting and highlighted some policy issues noting that there are established criteria for adding cases like staff extensions and appointments to

the CPR agenda. This criterion requires nominations to be circulated among member states two weeks before the CPR meeting with prior review by the Selection Panel for necessary recommendations to CPR. He referenced a decision from the 248th CPR meeting, which excluded a staff re-appointment case due to not meeting the timeframe required for inclusion of such matters in the CPR agenda.

144. In addition, the **ECO Secretary General** referenced Article 18, Chapter 3 concerning the rules of procedure, which states that any member country may propose new items for the Council of Ministers or Council of Permanent Representatives agendas. These proposals must be submitted to the Secretariat for circulation at least two weeks before the draft agenda is finalized. He pointed out that the issue raised by the DSG contradicts ECO regulations and CPR conclusions. Additionally, the DSG's intervention deviates from internal policy, which requires prior consultation between the Secretary General and relevant directing staff before raising issues during CPR proceedings. According to agreed procedures, any positions nearing the end of their tenure should be circulated three to four months before the current officeholders' terms end, he repeated with particular reference to the 285th CPR meeting in Yazd that recognized and reaffirmed this practice, deciding to follow it for the incoming Secretary General from Pakistan as well.

145. The **ECO Secretary General** again mentioned that his numerous verbal and email instructions to the administration were utterly ignored, and noted that the request for the extension of the incumbent Head of Section for administration was received on June 3, 2025, just two days before the CPR meeting, and has yet to be circulated due to administrative reasons. He further stated that, in accordance with Article 6.4 and other relevant staff regulations, he will formally communicate with the nominating country regarding this case of extension. He recommended no discussion on the issue at this premature stage as it contradicts ECO rules of procedure.

146. The **ECO Secretary General** once again drew the Council's attention to Paragraph 41 from the report of the 248th CPR meeting held on December 23, 2020. He underscored that at that time, the Representative of the Republic of Türkiye and the Chair of the Selection panel informed the Council that the Panel deferred discussion on the nomination of an Afghan national for the post of Program Officer to the next CPR meeting due to its non-adherence to the agreed procedure, which requires the circulation of any nomination amongst the Member States at least 14 days before the CPR meeting.

147. The Representative of the Islamic Republic of **Iran** referred to their Note Verbale dated June 2, 2024, sent to the Secretariat regarding the extension of the incumbent Head of Section for Administration until his successor joins the ECO Secretariat. He emphasized that the request clearly states their delegation's desire for the tenure of the incumbent Head of Section to be extended under these circumstances.

148. The **ECO Deputy Secretary General (Admn, EME, IR & IT)** noted that previously some similar cases had been considered by the CPR without meeting the specified criteria. He acknowledged his current inability to provide details on such cases presented to the CPR, typically before four or five days to the meeting. Furthermore, he highlighted that the Head of Section for Administration had undergone an interview with the Selection Panel prior to his appointment and had no

adverse record. Additionally, the Deputy Secretary General emphasized that the ECO Secretary General had assessed the current Head of Section for Administration positively in his remarks.

149. The Representative of the Islamic Republic of **Pakistan** highlighted that the issue at hand pertained not to the current Head of Section or past precedents, but rather to the lateness of the nomination, which lacked regulatory precedents for the Council's consideration. She emphasized the importance of maintaining mutual respect among the seasoned diplomats and ambassadors present, urging the Chair to guide the session to a constructive conclusion in accordance with the established rules and regulations of the ECO, agreed upon by all member countries. She proposed deferring the case to the next Council meeting. Furthermore, she noted previous instances where staff members continued their duties with retrospective approval from the CPR. She discouraged further debate on this matter, expressing concern that esteemed Council members should avoid undermining or disrespecting each other.

150. The **Chair** and the Permanent Representative of the Islamic Republic of **Iran** emphasized that, as per their information, the organization has never fully observed this specified criteria. He noted two main issues. First, the organization announces vacancies three to four months in advance. Second, the position in question belongs to Iran and is not open to all members. He added that due to internal procedures, Iran may be unable to replace the incumbent by the time his term ends, and may send a note stating that the current staff will continue until his replacement arrives. This process is necessary to ensure continuity since the position is designated for Iran, even if the vacancy was announced ten months ago and internal procedures are slow, he underlined.

151. The Representative of the Islamic Republic of **Pakistan** reiterated that this issue was not included in the agenda, and as per rules of procedure it should be deferred for next meeting.

152. The **Chair** and the Permanent Representative of the Islamic Republic of **Iran** once again emphasized on their understanding that the current staff member will remain in position until his successor joins, adding that this could be effective immediately or at a later date, as decisions have been applied retrospectively in the past. He stressed the need to expedite their internal procedures to facilitate early replacement against the post.

153. The Representative of the Islamic Republic of **Pakistan** maintained her request, asking the Secretariat to circulate a necessary note regarding Iran's request to extend the service of the current Head of the Administration Section until his successor arrives, in accordance with the agreed principles. She emphasized that the Council should allow the Secretary General to exercise his mandate, avoiding unnecessary debate and arguments.

154. The **ECO Secretary General** again noted that the problem is not with sending or receiving the notes verbale. Instead, the issue lies with the unjustifiable delay in implementing the Secretary General's clear instruction to circulate the note verbale regarding this post. This circulation was necessary for member states to discuss the issue and include it in the agenda for decision-making, he repeated. The Secretary

General expressed confusion about why his instructions were not heeded, emphasizing that the delay is not related to receiving the note verbale from Iran's Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

155. The **Chair** and the Permanent Representative of the Islamic Republic of **Iran** concluded that the report would reflect the Council's consideration of the Note Verbale from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs dated June 2, 2024. It was noted that the Head of Section for Administration may remain in his position until his replacement joins the Secretariat. The Chair stated that the necessary formalities will be completed according to CPR rules and procedures, and a decision will be made even without a two-week pre-notice. He emphasized that all actions will adhere to the rules and procedures. The delegation understands that there is no objection to this extension until the new Head of Section arrives, and the formalities will be addressed accordingly.

Agenda Item No.12

Any other business

156. The Permanent Representative of the **Kyrgyz** Republic announced that Bishkek will host the 10th Central Asia Mining and Geology Forum, MINEX Central Asia, on June 19-20, 2024. He mentioned that invitations had already been sent to the relevant Ministers of the Member States, expecting their participation in the event. He added that an invitation was also extended to H.E. the ECO Secretary General, who has formally expressed his inability to attend the Forum due to prior commitments. The Permanent Representative hoped the ECO Secretary General will nominate relevant staff to represent him at the event.

157. The Representative of the Islamic Republic of **Iran** announced that Iran will host the 19th Ministers of Foreign Affairs of the Asia Cooperation Dialogue on June 24, 2024. He noted that many ECO member countries are also part of this dialogue. Invitations have been sent to the ministers to participate in this important meeting in Tehran, which will be preceded by a senior officials meeting scheduled for June 23, 2024. The relevant notes have been dispatched to concerned embassies and to Iranian embassies abroad. He requested a prompt and positive response from the ministers and senior officials to ensure the success of the event.

158. The **ECO Secretary General** thanked the Republic of Kazakhstan for fully paying their 2024 annual contribution to ECO, noting the Republic of Tajikistan has also completed their budgetary share for the current year. However, these contributions account for only 19% of this year's total budget. He expressed concern as the Organization enters its sixth month of the financial year, which complicates participation in member state events, including that to be hosted by Kyrgyz Republic. The Secretariat would need to cover all related expenses if it decides to participate, given the current financial strain. Highlighting the upcoming transition in leadership, he stressed the need to ensure financial stability for the incoming Secretary General to help him focus on the organization's goals. He urged other member countries to expedite their membership contributions to support this effort.

Agenda Item No. 13

Date of the next CPR Meeting

159. The Council agreed to hold its next (289th) meeting on July 1, 2024 (Monday) at the ECO Secretariat.



Economic Cooperation Organization

ECO

No: CFU/2024/677

Priority: Most Urgent

Date: 23/5/2024

Attachment: No

The Secretariat of the Economic Cooperation Organization presents its compliments to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Islamic Republic of Iran and the Embassies of the ECO Member States in Tehran and, based on the consultation with the Chair, has the honour to convey the postponement of the First High-Level Committee (HLC) Meeting of the Deputy Foreign Ministers due to lack of quorum as per requirement of the HLC's Terms of Reference. The new dates may be decided during the upcoming CPR Meeting.

The Secretariat avails itself of this opportunity to renew to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Islamic Republic of Iran and the Embassies of the ECO Member States in Tehran, the assurances of its highest consideration.

All ECO Member States, Tehran





Economic Cooperation Organization

ECO

No: DSG-Admin/2024/698

Priority: Urgent

Date: 29/5/2024

Attachment: Yes

The Secretariat of the Economic Cooperation Organization presents its compliments to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Islamic Republic of Iran and the Embassies of the ECO Member States in Tehran and has the honour to enclose the Final Draft Report of the ECO Vision 2025 Review Committee, along with annexures of the document.

The enclosed Report will be submitted for consideration by 288th Meeting of the ECO Council of Permanent Representative, scheduled for June 5, 2024.

The Secretariat of the Economic Cooperation Organization avails itself of this opportunity to renew to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Islamic Republic of Iran and the Embassies of the ECO Member States in Tehran the assurances of its highest consideration.

All ECO Member States - Tehran





**ECONOMIC COOPERATION ORGANIZATION
(ECO)**

**Draft Report of the
ECO Vision 2025
Review Committee**



Draft Report of the ECO Vision 2025 Review Committee

Introduction

➤ ECO Vision - 2025

The 13th ECO Summit held in Islamabad in March 2017 adopted the ECO Vision 2025. The document outlines a strategic roadmap for sustainable economic growth, enhanced regional connectivity and socio-economic development across the ten ECO member countries. The vision focuses on economic integration, regional connectivity, energy cooperation, agricultural progress, sustainable development and social welfare. It aims to facilitate trade and investment, develop infrastructure, optimize energy resources, align with global sustainable development goals and improve education and healthcare in the member countries. Implementation strategies include collaborative frameworks, institutional strengthening, resource mobilization and robust monitoring and evaluation mechanisms to ensure progress and accountability.

➤ Midterm Review (2021)

A Mid-term Review of the ECO Vision 2025 conducted in 2021 evaluates the progress made towards achieving the goals set out in the strategic roadmap since its adoption. This review highlights key accomplishments, identifies challenges and offers recommendations for the remaining period. Significant progress has been reported in areas such as trade facilitation, infrastructure development and energy cooperation, with notable projects and initiatives launched to enhance regional connectivity and economic integration. However, the challenges like financial constraints, political instability and the need for stronger institutional frameworks were highlighted. The midterm review emphasizes the importance of continued collaboration, resource mobilization and effective monitoring to ensure the successful realization of ECO Vision 2025's objectives.

➤ Establishment of Vision Review Committee

Based on the ambitious declarations made by 27th Meeting of the ECO Council of Ministers in Shusha, Azerbaijan, ECO 284th Meeting of the ECO Council of Permanent Representatives (CPR) established the ECO Vision 2025 Review Committee to evaluate the progress made under the guidance of vision document and the guidelines provided by ECO vision Midterm Review 2021.

From April to May 2024, the ECO Vision 2025 Review Committee held its four meetings under the Chairmanship of Mr. Behzad Azarsa, Senior Expert, Multilateral & International Economic Cooperation, Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Islamic Republic of Iran.

Methodology

➤ Concise Review

The Review Committee assessed activities since 2021 under the ECO Vision Midterm Review, focusing on strategic implementation and refining project priorities through their four interactions.

➤ Prioritizing Implementable Projects

In the final 18 months of ECO Vision 2025, the committee prioritized critical and feasible projects, updating progress reports and aligning strategies with the 2021 Mid-term Review to enhance regional connectivity and collaboration.

➤ Post-2025 Approach

The Review Committee's Post-2025 approach considers extending or renewing ECO Vision 2025 to sustain momentum and address new challenges, ensuring continued regional integration and sustainable development.

Progress Achieved

The Review Committee conducted a thorough evaluation of activities since 2021, guided by insights from the ECO Vision Midterm Review Report (ANNEX-I). Over the course of four interactions, the committee meticulously analyzed progress and the strategic implementation of ECO Vision 2025, focusing on optimizing priorities and ensuring the effective execution of critical projects. Central to their approach was a methodical review aimed at identifying areas requiring improvement and refining strategies to better achieve the Vision's objectives. This comprehensive assessment not only consolidated achievements but also provided a structured framework for enhancing future planning and implementation efforts, based on the current vision implementation experiences, as well as the diverse recommendations of ECO Heads of State/Government, including the proposal of the Honourable President of Uzbekistan concerning the formation of ECO Strategic Objectives 2025.

As ECO Vision 2025 approaches its final 18 months, the committee strategically prioritized the implementation of feasible and pivotal projects. There was a concerted effort to prioritize attainable goals aimed at bolstering regional connectivity and fostering collaboration among Member States across critical sectors such as trade, transport, energy, agriculture, industry, HRSD and health. This focused prioritization is designed to yield tangible outcomes by 2025 through continuous refinement and active engagement with stakeholders, ensuring sustained progress towards the Vision's overarching goals (ANNEX-II).

Looking ahead, the committee also explored avenues to extend or renew the ECO Vision beyond 2025. Options include building upon the current framework to capitalize on existing momentum and achievements or issuing a renewed mandate that addresses emerging challenges and opportunities. This forward-thinking approach

aims to maintain a cohesive strategic direction that promotes sustainable development and enhances regional integration well beyond the original timeline of ECO Vision 2025.

In the above context, the summary reports on the exclusively held four meetings of ECO Vision Review Committee were duly circulated amongst the member countries.

Descriptive Importance

This concerted effort reflects the member states’ collective commitment to harnessing the transformative potential of the ECO Vision 2025. By strategically focusing on critical projects and activities, the Organization aims to expedite progress and address existing challenges effectively. These endeavors not only signify the ECO’s unwavering dedication to regional cooperation but also highlight the tangible benefits that are on the horizon.

As the Organization embarks on the final leg of the ECO Vision 2025 journey, it is imperative to acknowledge the significance of these efforts in promoting sustainable development, enhancing connectivity and fostering prosperity across member states. Through collaborative action and steadfast determination, the ECO countries are paving the way for a brighter and more prosperous future for their populations.

Expected Outcomes

This proactive approach towards regional integration is expected to yield substantial dividends. In the Trade & Investment sector, increased cooperation is anticipated to boost intra-regional trade and attract foreign investments, thereby stimulating economic growth. Enhanced Transport & Communications infrastructure will facilitate smoother and more efficient movement of goods and people, fostering closer economic ties. In the Energy and Environment sectors, joint projects will aim to ensure sustainable resource management and environmental protection, addressing the pressing challenges of climate change and resource depletion.

In the Agriculture and Industry sectors, collaborative initiatives will focus on modernizing agricultural practices and industrial processes, thus enhancing productivity and sustainability. Human Resource & Sustainable Development efforts will prioritize education, health, and social welfare, ensuring that the benefits of economic growth are inclusive and widespread. Finally, the Tourism sector will leverage the region's rich cultural and natural heritage to attract global tourists, creating jobs and promoting cultural exchange.

By steadfastly pursuing these strategic priorities, the ECO Vision 2025 endeavors to create an integrated and dynamic economic region. The shared commitment of the member states towards these goals underlines a collective aspiration for peace, stability and prosperity. This vision for enhanced economic cooperation and integration is not merely a roadmap for the present but a foundation for future generations, ensuring that the region continues to thrive in an increasingly interconnected and interdependent global landscape

Summary

The meticulous work of the ECO Vision 2025 Review Committee is paramount for ensuring the smooth and timely implementation of the organization's critical projects and activities within the set timeline. This effort underscores the collective resolve of member states to realize the transformative potential of the ECO Vision 2025. By focusing on sector-specific priorities, the ECO is poised to expedite progress and tackle regional challenges effectively. This proactive approach will boost intra-regional trade; enhance connectivity and foster sustainable development, ensuring inclusive growth and shared prosperity. These efforts are foundational for future generations, reinforcing the ECO's commitment to peace, stability and economic integration.

Recommendation

Based on the comprehensive review by the ECO Vision 2025 Review Committee, it is recommended that the proposed document outlining priority projects and activities be submitted for approval to the Council of Permanent Representatives (CPR) and the Council of Ministers.

This document is a critical roadmap for the remaining 18 months of the ECO Vision 2025 timeline, encapsulating the strategic priorities necessary for achieving the vision's ambitious targets. Approval will ensure these projects receive the requisite support and resources, facilitating their timely and effective implementation and accelerating progress towards regional development, cooperation and integration.

ECO Vision 2025 Review Committee

With reference to Shusha Declaration (paragraph-35) adopted at the 27th Meeting of the Council of Ministers (COM) of the ECO Member States (Shusha - October 10, 2023), the 284th meeting of the ECO Council of Permanent Representatives (CPR) (ECO Secretariat - January 30, 2024) decided to establish an ECO Vision 2025 Review Committee, which will assess the pace of implementation of the ECO Vision 2025 programmatic document and submit its report and conclusions to the 1st meeting of the High Level Committee, comprised of the Deputy Foreign Ministers of the ECO Member States, to be held in 27-28 May 2024 at the ECO Secretariat.

2. In this regard, the ECO Secretariat organized the 1st meeting of the ECO Vision 2025 Review Committee on 3rd April 2024 under the Chairmanship of Mr. Behzad Azarsa, Senior Expert, Multilateral & International Economic Cooperation of the Islamic Republic of Iran. During the meeting, it was decided that we should proceed further to base our work at par last Mid-term Review of ECO Vision 2025 and tasked the Directing Staff of the Secretariat to submit their updated inputs/report, concerning to their directorate, towards i) Stocktaking and progress made ii) Bottlenecks/impediments and iii) The way forward for circulation amongst Member States.

3. During the 286th CPR Meeting, held on 8th April 2024, the Chair of the meeting while commending for successfully convening the inaugural meeting of ECO Vision 2025 Review Committee on April 3, 2024, emphasized that ECO Vision 2025 Review should be based on ECO Vision 2025 Mid-Term Report, which was adopted in 2021 at the 25th COM held in Ashgabat. He also stressed for a concise review since 2021, discouraging repetition of earlier reports, prioritizing actionable projects for the remaining 18 months of the current ECO Vision, as well as post-2025 directions, including extending or renewing the vision document.

4. The inputs/proposals received from the Directing Staff of the Secretariat are placed below to be considered during the 2nd Meeting of the ECO Vision 2025 Review Committee scheduled to be held on 24th April 2024.

CONTENTS:

- A. Trade & Investment**
- B. Transport and Communication**
- C. Energy**
- D. Tourism**
- E. Economic Growth and Productivity**
- F. Social Welfare and Environment**
- G. Judicial and Parliamentary Coordination and ECO Advocacy Program for Afghanistan**

A: TRADE

Vision Expected Outcome i:

The ECO Trade Agreement (ECOTA) will be operationalized and the membership of ECOTA will be increased.

1. Stocktaking and progress made

Although the promotion of intra-regional trade has been one of the constant and important goals of the ECO throughout its life, the achievements have been less than expected and achievable. In 2020, only 8.3% out of \$484 billion foreign trade of 10 member States was traded among themselves till the reported time. The final figure was US\$ 56.87 billion in 2020¹. In 2021 the Intra-regional trade was recorded at US\$ 79.524 billion, registering a year-on-year growth of 39.8 % over 2020. Likewise the intra-regional trade grew by 21.4 % in 2022 over 2021 with US\$ 96.505 billion.

On the basis of logic behind trade agreements among countries of a given region, there was a great optimism that implementation of ECO Trade Agreement (ECOTA) and its supplementary regulatory and institutional back-ups would boost intra-regional trade within the ECO. This optimism still exists, awaiting full implementation of ECOTA and its expansion to embrace all ECO Member States. No substantial progress has been made since adoption of ECO Vision 2025. Rather, the global pandemic crisis deteriorated the intra-regional trade profile in the 2020 and 2021. However, there has been some increase in intra-regional trade but it is due to bilateral trading arrangements among the ECO Member States or the Non ECO arrangements as there is no operational 'preferential trading arrangement' under the umbrella of the ECO. Progress in Trade Facilitation and Connectivity can be attributed to have played a role in this increase but the Operationalization of tariff reduction under ECOTA can be a game changer for the region.

2. Bottlenecks / impediments

The following obstacles are among those impeding operationalization of the ECOTA and its expansion to a FTA:

- Pending actions by the ECOTA Parties to effectuate tariff reduction at the customs with the product lists.
- A tacit, but strong, view that ECOTA will not be a win-win trade arrangement,

¹ Trade map, ICT web based tools, accessed on 16-4-2024.

- Call amendment in the agreement, especially Article 4 (Tariff Reduction Modality), and the demand for balancing the obligations and benefits for all parties.
- Divergence of opinions on methodology of preparation and exchange of lists,
- Divergent interpretation on whether or not ECOTA has legally entered into force,
- Ineffective institutional support for implementation of ECOTA, including through “ECOTA Cooperation Council”, and delayed response by the Member States on proposals relating to ECOTA Operationalization,
- Ambiguity and uncertainty around the ECOTA among other reasons, has prevented the rest of the ECO membership to seriously consider joining the Agreement,
- Problems in scheduling the ECOTA Cooperation Council Meetings to make expert level recommendations and directions to the efforts of the Secretariat to invoke ECOTA.

3. The way forward

To address the above mentioned impediments, the ECO Secretariat has shared with the Contracting Parties three scenarios for tariff reductions, developed in an outsourced study². The ECOTA Cooperation Council (ECOTA CC) Meeting was offered by the I.R of Pakistan to be hosted in 2021. However, the meetings could not be held in 2021 due to lack of confirmation from the ECOTA parties. During the 32nd RPC again I.R of Pakistan offered to host the 9th ECOTA CC Meeting in 2022 and accordingly scheduled the meeting twice in 2022 on 27-28 July (in-person) format and on 31st October – 1st November, 2022 (virtual) but on both occasions the meeting was postponed due to the lack of quorum². In the year 2023 the I.R of Pakistan again offered to host the 9th ECOTA CC Meeting but the meeting couldn't be scheduled since August 2019. The Secretariat offered to host the 9th ECOTA CC Meeting in hybrid format on 26th October 2023 but again no confirmation was received from the ECOTA Parties.

Likewise the '5th ECO Ministerial Meeting of Commerce & Foreign Trade (5th ECO MMF&T)' was offered by Republic of Türkiye to host in 2021 and 2022 but co5th ECO Ministerial Meeting of Commerce & Foreign Trade (5th ECO MMF&T) couldn't be held. In 2023 Republic of Türkiye subjected the

² On 27-28 July 2022, the meeting was postponed as only Pakistan (host) and Iran confirmed their participation (in-person mode). On 31Oct-1st Nov 2022, Pakistan (host) and Türkiye confirmed their participation (in virtual mode).

hosting the '5th ECO MMF&T' to successful conclusion of the 9th ECOTA CC Meeting' but it could not be held.

The scenarios prepared by the Secretariat have been shared with ECOTA Contracting Parties to seek their comments but no comments have been received on the report. These scenarios were also shared with Non-ECOTA Parties to harness their interests.

A parallel scenario, as mandated by the ECO Vision 2025, is to move to negotiations for completely new agreement, including a comprehensive trade liberalization agreement, or a Free Trade Agreement. The Secretariat drafted ToRs for a FTA and proposed to 32nd RPC to initiate a research study on the Prospects of an FTA in ECO region' but the proposals was not agreed in 32nd RPC.

The Secretariat, realizing the pivotal importance of 9th ECOTA CC Meeting to agree on a way forward, proposed to host a virtual consultation session among ECOTA Parties' experts on 7th May 2024. Pakistan and Tajikistan has confirmed their participation in the session. It is expected that the experts will take a stick of the position and agree on way forward to schedule 9th ECOTA CC Meeting.

The Secretariat will also highlight the Trade Facilitation Measures initiatives under the remaining Articles of ECOTA to increase intraregional trade.

14th ECO Summit: ECO leaders emphasized on the need for further increase in intra-regional trade volume, early implementation of the ECOTA as well as the need for removal of tariff and non-tariff barriers, trade promotion measures, and free movement of funds, goods and services among Member States and within ECO Region.

Vision Expected outcome ii:

The scope of ECOTA will be enhanced from preferential trade to Free trade Agreement.

1. Stocktaking and progress made

Since adoption of the ECO Vision 2025, the Organization has been focusing on the operationalization of the ECOTA, thus the expansion of the coverage of ECOTA to a Free Trade Agreement remained elusive and no progress has been made on this account. At the 8th ECOTA Cooperation Council meeting, the Republic of Türkiye offered to prepare a draft of the FTA for

consideration of the Member States. However, it was agreed that the Member States will share their views and comments of ways and means to operationalize ECOTA. The progress on a FTA remained stalled. The Secretariat conducted a study on 'Impediments to ECO Trade Agreements and Measures to Resolve' also entails an idea of an "ECO Comprehensive Trade Liberalization Agreement" (ECTLA) but during 32nd RPC Republic of Türkiye indicated that Expansion of ECOTA to an FTA is a second step and at first Operationalization of ECOTA may be pursued. The Secretariat has prepared the TORs for a study on benefits of an FTA to rope in the interest of all the Member States in trade liberalization. The 9th ECOTA CC Meeting will address the matter in more detail.

2. Bottlenecks/impediments

The intra-regional trade in ECO region has never been supported by any ECO regional trade framework and the existing trade volume among ECO Member States are attributed to the bilateral and non-ECO trade arrangements. This is why that ECO documents, including the ECO Vision 2025, have envisaged ECOTA as prelude to any ECO free trade arrangement. So, as far as the ECOTA is away from implementation, the realization of the imperative of an ECO free trade agreement seems away. In this regard, the decision to establish a Free Trade Area would lead to the following two options:

- a. Implement ECOTA, and progressive trade liberalization through negotiations on tariff reduction over and above ECOTA Article 4(tariff reduction modality) should be pursued to enhance its coverage on substantial trade beyond 90% with deeper commitments on tariff cuts.
- b. Negotiate a fresh Free Trade Agreement without any reference to ECOTA to cover substantial trade with gradual and deeper tariff reduction commitments including a chapter on trade in services and investments.

However, there is an emerging view that in case of no prospect for implementation of the ECOTA, and in case no agreement on revising the ECOTA, the Organization may move directly to start negotiations for a Free Trade Agreement having all Member states on board.

3. The way forward

Along with all efforts to operationalize ECOTA, the Secretariat will push for comments on the draft ECO 'Comprehensive Trade Liberalization Agreement' which will be drafted through a research study, if approved by the 9th ECOTA CC and other measures with a view to preparing, finalizing

and operationalizing of FTA/Trade Liberalization Agreement.

Vision Expected outcome iii:

Non-WTO Member Countries will be assisted in their accession to WTO.

1. Stocktaking and progress made

The ECO support for WTO accession processes of its 4 ECO Member States, awaiting WTO full Membership has continued to be of political and capacity building nature. Activities like trade policy review, seminars on trading patterns in ECO region and workshops on accession to the WTO have been hosted by Afghanistan, Iran, Pakistan and Türkiye.

The most recent development was the call by 33rd RPC meeting where the Council requested the four non-WTO ECO Member States to inform the ECO Secretariat if they are interested in any training workshop/seminar related to their accession to WTO. However, in the last 5 years no interest was indicated by the non-WTO ECO Member States. In the wake of lack of interest of the Non-WTO ECO Member States the 34th RPC excluded the item from Annual Work Programme and Calendar of Events for 2024 with a provision that the same can be taken up the Secretariat when the related Member States indicate any interest in the activity.

2. Bottlenecks / impediments

There seems to be no real impediments given the fact that this kind of cooperation within ECO mainly focuses on experience sharing among ECO-WTO Member States and Non-WTO Member States. The Non WTO ECO Member States can indicate their interest any time and the Secretariat will pursue the ECO Member States which are also members of the WTO, to host these events.

3. The Way Forward

As envisaged in the Vision Implementation Framework, there should be regular consultations and exchange of ideas on how to assist Non-Member States. The Secretariat may also be mandated to approach WTO Secretariat and other relevant organizations such as UNCTAD and ITC as well as some WTO members to cooperate with ECO in assisting its Non- WTO Member States. The Secretariat can pursue with WTO Secretariat for some training spots for the ECO Member states under the WTO technical Cooperation for developing countries.

Vision Expected outcome iv:

Following pending trade related agreements will be operationalized:

a. ECO Agreement on Mutual Administrative Assistance in Customs Matters

1. Stocktaking and progress made

The draft text of the Agreement on Mutual Administrative Assistance in Customs Matters has been finalized and circulated among the Member States for completion of formalities and internal procedures.

The Republic of Azerbaijan and the Islamic Republic of Pakistan have since completed their internal procedures. The 5th ECO Ministerial Meeting on Finance and Economy (26 May 2021, virtual Tajikistan) recommend the ECO Member States to sign and ratify the Agreement as a step towards greater trade facilitation and transparency.

The draft text of the Agreement on Mutual Administrative Assistance in Customs Matters was discussed in detailed deliberations during the 5th ECO Customs Cooperation Committee Meeting (Ankara, in-person, June 21, 2023) and 9th ECO Committee of Heads of Customs Administration (CHCA) (Baku, In Person, June 20, 2023). The Member States (Except Republic of Azerbaijan and the I.R of Pakistan) were again requested to finalize their internal procedures and share their updates so that the agreement can be submitted to upcoming 5th ECO MM on C&FT to approve it and open it for signatures and ratification.

2. Bottlenecks / impediments

This draft agreement suffers from similar impediments facing other ECO draft agreement that is delayed signature and ratification by Member States leading to its delay in entering into force.

3. The Way Forward

The remaining Member States shall be encouraged to sign and ratify this important agreement. The ECO summit meetings, relevant ministerial meetings as well as the 10th meetings of ECO Council of Heads of Customs Administration (CHCA), in 2024 and the 6th ECO Committee on Customs Cooperation (ECCC) constitute opportunities to making headway and roping-in the full membership to join the initiatives.

b) ECO Agreement on Joint Promotional Activities

1. Stocktaking and progress made

The drafting of the “ECO Agreement on Joint Promotional Activities (ECO-AJPA)” is yet delayed. The Secretariat finalized the approved draft of the Agreement after its adoption by the 3rd ECO Trade Promotion Organization Forum (TPO Forum). The adopted text was circulated among the member states for the completion of internal procedures and views/comments. Only Republic of Azerbaijan has responded to the Secretariat. The Secretariat has circulated the draft again and included the matter as an agenda item for the 4th ECO TPOs Forum, to be hosted by Pakistan in 2024. The response from Member States is still awaited.

2. Bottlenecks/ impediments

The next meeting of the ECO Trade Promotion Organizations Forum is scheduled in 2024 where the main task is to discuss and agree on the adopted draft of the Agreement.

3. The Way Forward

The Member States may be kindly apprised the importance of the agreement and requested to share their comments. The ECO Chamber of Commerce and Industries may also be invited to share their input on the components of the envisaged agreement with a view to presenting the adopted draft of the Agreement and its Protocol to the higher forums.

c) ECO Trade Facilitation Agreement

1. Stocktaking and progress made

As per Vision Implementation Framework, the final draft Agreement was supposed to be circulated among Member States in 2020. It has not been the case yet. Alternatively, a draft ECO Trade Facilitation Strategy (ETFS) (prepared by the Republic of Turkey in 2017) has been circulated among Member States for their views and comments. Views and Comments were received from I.R of Afghanistan, Republic of Azerbaijan and Republic of Uzbekistan.

In the meanwhile, the Secretariat conducted a research study titled “*Impediments to ECO Trade Agreements and Measures to Resolve*” in which a draft text of ‘*draft ECO Trade Facilitation Agreement (ETFA)*’ was prepared and

circulated among the Member States in 2021 for their comments. The comments from the Member States are awaited. The '*1st Joint Working Group (JWG) Meeting on draft ETFS/ETFA*' (Ankara, in-person, date) deliberated on the comments of the Member States were discussed and the draft of the '*ECO Trade Facilitation Strategy*' was finalized. The finalized draft with report of the meeting was circulated among the Member States for their comments. So far comments have been received from Kazakhstan, The final draft of the Strategy will be deliberated in the '*2nd JWG Meeting on ETFS/ETFA*', to be hosted by the Republic of Uzbekistan in 2024.

The '*1st JWG Meeting on draft ETFS/ETFA*' also deliberated on the draft text of ETFA, prepared by the Secretariat and the ensuing comments of Republic of Uzbekistan on the draft text of the Agreement. The draft text of the Agreement will be deliberated in the '*2nd JWG Meeting on ETFS/ETFA*'.

2. Bottlenecks / impediments

Only few Member States have shared their views on the finalized draft ETFS. Until and unless views of all Member States are secured, a solid step towards identification of the components of ECO TFS and ETFA cannot be specified and the way to operationalize it cannot be taken.

The provision of comments by the Member States will pave the way for further negotiations on the ETFS/ ETFA in the '*2nd Joint Working Group (JWG) for the preparation of Draft ECO Trade Facilitation Strategy/ Agreement*'. It is pertinent to mention that the *4th Ministerial Meeting of Commerce & Foreign Trade of ECO* (2011, Kabul) instructed the establishment of the said Working Group in order to prepare a Trade Facilitation Agreement for the ECO Region.

3. The Way Forward

As soon as views and comments of all Member States are received, the draft Strategy and the comments will be brought to the table as agenda items in the '*2nd JWG meeting on TFS/TFA*' to be hosted by Uzbekistan to finalize the ETFS/ETFA, as originally had been set by Vision 2025.

The 5th ECO Ministerial Meeting on Commerce and Foreign Trade may be the first available occasion to approve the final "ECO TFS/ EFTA".

d) Regional Agreement on Cooperation in Taxation Matters

1. Stocktaking and progress made

The drafts of “Charter for Establishment of ECO Tax Administration Cooperation Society”, “ECO Memorandum of Understanding on Cooperation in Taxation and Related Matters” and “Agreement on the Exchange of Information in Tax Matters among ECO Member States were finalized in 2014 awaiting concrete actions.

The 31st RPC meeting instructed the Secretariat to share these draft agreements, adopted in the *1st Meeting of Heads of the ECO Tax Administration*, again with the Member States. The Secretariat shared these documents with the Member States for their views and comments. The Secretariat is planning to table these agreements in the *2nd Meeting of Heads of ECO Tax Administration*, for adoption; enabling their submission to higher fora for approval. The 5th ECO Ministerial Meeting on Finance and Economy (26th May 2021) again encouraged to sign and implement the three documents for transparency and improving ease of doing business in the Region. The I.R of Pakistan requested the Secretariat to host a *Preliminary Discussion Meeting* before ‘*2nd Meeting of the Heads of Tax Administration*’, which was offered to be hosted by I.R of Pakistan in 2022. The ‘*Preliminary Discussion Meeting*’ was hosted by the Secretariat in virtual format on 01.08.2023, in which the views/comments shared by the Republic of Azerbaijan, I.R of Iran, Republic of Kazakhstan, I.R of Pakistan, Republic of Türkiye and Republic of Uzbekistan were deliberated and it was unanimously agreed to drop the other two documents and the ‘*Draft Charter of the ECO Tax Administration Cooperation Society (ECOTAX)*’ was finalized after editing its articles/ adding new articles. The Agenda of the ‘*2nd Meeting of the ECO Heads of Tax Administration*’ was also finalized. The Secretariat circulated the documents among the Member States.

Nevertheless, during the 34th RPC, the I.R of Iran offered to host Preliminary Discussion Meetings, before the ‘*2nd Meeting of the Heads of the ECO Tax Administration*’ to again review the documents/agreed draft of the ‘*Charter for Establishment of ECO Tax Administration Cooperation Society*’. The 34th RPC mandated the said meetings with the caveat that the decisions already agreed will be pursued in the *2nd Meeting of the Heads of the ECO Tax Administration Authorities*’. The Secretariat has offered the Member States to host the ‘*2nd Meeting of the Heads of the ECO Tax Administration*’

2. Bottlenecks / impediments

Regional cooperation on this important issue is still pending despite the fact that its importance is acknowledged by Member States for attracting investment in the region. The Impediment to be removed at early stage is inability to get as maximum assupport needed to finalize and implement the

one instrument which has been finalized unanimously in the *Preliminary Discussion Meeting (PDM) of the experts*. Reopening the same will lead to unwarranted delay. Moreover, the hosting of the '*2nd Meeting of the Heads of the ECO Tax Administration*' by Member States need to be addressed.

3. The Way Forward

As envisaged by the Vision Implementation Framework, the regular meetings of the ECO Heads Tax Administration can assist in establishing regular consultations and decision making towards implementation of these instruments. The ECO Expert Group meetings on Taxation as already held as PDM on August 1, 2023, finalized one document and Agenda for the *2nd Meeting of the Heads of the ECO Tax Administration*. The agreed course of action will be pursued without any inter-locutions to avoid the delay.

Vision Expected outcome v:

ECO Visa Sticker Scheme for businessmen will be operationalized.

1. Stocktaking and progress made

The Vision Implementation Framework had foreseen that by 2020 the "Agreement on Simplification of Visa Procedures for Businessmen of the ECO Member States" would be signed and ratified simplifying and harmonizing visa procedures across the ECO Region. The Agreement has been signed by seven and ratified by five Member States. The Agreement came into force in 2002. It provides for issuance of visa within 72 hours to businessmen upon request accompanied with a letter from concerned Ministry and endorsed by Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

The "Additional Protocol on Simplification of Visa Procedures for Businessmen and Transit Drivers of the ECO Member States" has been signed by three and ratified by one Member States i.e. I.R of Pakistan.

The Visa facilitation is an integral part of trade facilitation and the ECO Business community has always been demanding for visa facilitation. The ECO CCI emphasized the introduction of Visa Sticker Scheme for the businessmen on the lines of SAARC/ASEAN. The Secretariat drafted a Project Proposal and the project document was circulated among the Member States for views/comments on August 10, 2022. However, the views/comments were not received from the Member States as well as ECO CCI. For taking a decision on the project, the 267th CPR discussed the matter and the Secretariat was tasked to prepare a draft questionnaire and circulate with the Member

States to obtain the comments. The council also mandated the Secretariat to host a virtual meeting to deliberate and finalize the matter.

In accordance with the decision of 267th CPR the Secretariat pursued the mandate and took the following actions:

1. The Secretariat circulated draft questionnaire on October 2, 2022, among Member States and ECO CCI for their input and also requested the ECO-CCI, the original proponent and the end user of the project, to prepare a detailed account of the problems and bottle-necks being faced by the business community in visa issuance and facilitation amid the existing regional collaboration on visa facilitation, with a view to plug the loopholes. However the inputs are awaited.
2. The Secretariat scheduled a virtual meeting on 12th July 2023 and requested the Member States for their nominations. However; only three Member States namely Iran, Pakistan and Tajikistan shared their nominations. Whereas, Azerbaijan indicated their inability to participate in the Meeting. The meeting was postponed due to lack of quorum and rescheduled on 19th September 2023, which was again postponed due to lack of interest and lack of quorum.

Given the complexity of the issues in Visa Sticker Scheme and difficulty in developing consensus, the 34th RPC closed the project and mandated the Secretariat to pursue the matter through the input requested under the questionnaire and develop consensus through a virtual meeting of the Member States as per the mandate given by the 267th CPR. Accordingly, the Project on Issuance of ECO Visa Sticker Scheme has not been closed.

2. Bottlenecks / impediments

The signing/ratification rate of the said Agreement and Additional Protocol constitute an impediment against implementation of this expected outcome, without the participation of all Member States.

Apparently, no interest has been shown so far from non-signatory Member States to join the Agreement and its protocol.

3. The Way Forward

The 34th RPC requested the remaining Member States to sign and ratify the Agreement and the Additional Protocol at the earliest. Given the importance of these instruments for overall intra-regional trade within ECO,

and along with efforts to give impacts to the ECOTA (or any other ECO-wide trade arrangement), the ECO Secretariat and Member States, at least those which ratified the Agreement, should adopt necessary steps to operationalize visa facilitation. ECO Chamber of Commerce should also play its role.

Vision Expected outcome vi:

The ECO Reinsurance Company will be operationalized.

1. Stocktaking / progress made

The Articles of Agreement of ECO Reinsurance Company (ERC) entered into force in December 2017 with three ratification instruments. The nominations for the General Assembly are now complete. The Contracting Parties are expected to release/transfer their paid-up capital of the Company. In 2021, the Islamic Republic of Iran conveyed its readiness to transfer its share. The information was shared by the Secretariat with the other two Contracting Parties for taking further operationalization process.

On February 6, 2023, the Secretariat organized a Virtual Preparatory Meeting of the ERC to deliberate on the process for operationalization of the ECO Reinsurance Company (ERC). The event, held in hybrid mode, was attended by delegates of the ERC's Contracting Parties, including Iran, Pakistan and Türkiye. The meeting discussed, at length, the various technical issues in operationalization of the ERC, including transfer of paid-in capital contribution, host country agreement, drafting a regulatory framework for the Company, etc. It was agreed to complete the initial drafting of the regulatory framework with inputs from all stakeholders for the early operationalization of the ERC. Moreover, the meeting decided that the '1st Meeting of the General Assembly of the ERC' will be held back to back with the '1st BoD Meeting of the ERC' to ensure the adoption of regulations for functioning of the Company within 60 days. Following is the updated status of the implementation of the decisions of the Virtual Preparatory Meeting of the ERC:

S#	Decision of the Meeting	Implementation Status
1.	The I.R. of Pakistan will prepare initial drafts of the regulations for GA & BoD, the recruitment policy, the financial & service rules, etc, and share with relevant stakeholders for input and finalization.	Response from the I.R. of Pakistan is awaited.
2.	I.R. of Pakistan and the Secretariat will coordinate and announce the dates for	The Secretariat sought approval of the 273 rd Council of Permanent

	<p>1st Meeting of GA & BoD at an early date. The Secretariat will seek relevant approval of CPR to host these two meetings in Tehran.</p>	<p>Representatives (CPR), held on February 27, 2023, which mandated the Secretariat to organize 1st Meeting of the GA preceded by 1st BoD Meeting of the ERC. Meeting Schedule is awaited from I.R of Pakistan.</p>
3.	<p>I.R. of Pakistan will finalize consultation of State Bank of Pakistan (SBP) with Central Bank of I.R. of Iran (CBI) and share details of the modality for transfer of Capital Contribution by Parties. I.R. of Iran and Republic of Türkiye, have already expressed their readiness to share Capital Contribution, awaiting modality to transfer their capital contribution.</p>	<p>Response from the I.R. of Pakistan is awaited regarding the latest updates on coordination of SBP with CBI. The ERC authorities in I.R. of Pakistan are requested to share updates in matter of transfer the Capital Contribution by I.R. of Iran and Republic of Türkiye to ERC.</p>
4.	<p>The Secretariat will circulate fresh nominations of I.R. of Iran for GA & BoD upon receipt, which completes the final nominations for both the forums.</p>	<p>The I.R. of Iran, I.R. of Pakistan and Republic of Türkiye have shared their nominations. After receiving updated nominations, the ECO Secretariat circulated the same in January 2013.</p>
5.	<p>The Secretariat will also circulate the details of payable paid-in Capital Contributions to the Parties.</p>	<p>The Secretariat circulated the requisite information in 2023.</p>
6.	<p>Republic of Türkiye will share formal request for updating the information to replace the name of the Turkish Catastrophe Insurance Pool (TCIP), in place of T.C Ziraat Bankasi, as the relevant authority to deal with matters relating to ERC. The Secretariat will circulate the updated information.</p>	<p>Türkiye has shared following information: "It has been decided that the founding shareholder of ECO Reinsurance Company on behalf of Türkiye will be the Turkish Catastrophe Insurance Pool (TCIP) instead of Ziraat Bank due to its international recognition, institutional capacity and experience in the field of reinsurance, and in this context, the shares belonging to the Bank will be transferred to TCIP and the capital increases that may be required in the future will be covered by TCIP." The Secretariat has circulated the said information.</p>

2. Bottlenecks/impediments

Legally, the Company will be operational when its General Assembly and Board of Governors convene their meetings. The release/transfer of the capital share of all three Contracting Parties seems to be required before the Company Headquarters in Karachi becomes operational. The host authorities have to share the details on transfer of paid in capital contributions and the State Bank of Pakistan and Bank Markazi Iran consultation is awaited to make a decision on how to affect the said transfer amid sanctions.

3. Way Forward

To ensure effective operationalization of the Company, there should be efforts on:

- i. Existing Contracting Parties to transfer their capital share, as committed,
- ii. The host country i.e. I.R of Pakistan to share the modalities for transfer of paid-in capital contributions, host country agreement, financial and recruitment politicizes for stakeholders consultation before submitting to General Assembly and Board of Governors for approval.
- iii. The host Country to organize General Assembly and Board of Governors meetings in consultation with the Secretariat. Secretariat will host the meetings as approved by 273rd CPR.
- iv. The remaining Member States to positively consider joining the Company.

Vision Expected outcome vii:

The role of the ECO Bank will be strengthened in the development of ECO economies. The membership of the Bank will be expanded.

1. Stocktaking and progress made

The Vision Implementation Framework has envisaged four new accessions to the Bank by 2022. No enlargement of the Bank membership happened since inception of the ECO Vision 2025.

The 5th ECO Ministerial Meeting on Finance and Economy while reiterating the call to the remaining Member States to join the Bank encouraged the Bank to operate more strongly in the areas of common interests within ECO, including through mobilizing more financial resources to increase its lending capacities. The Secretariat has been inviting the remaining 4 Member States to join the

Bank. The Secretary General ECO participated in the Annual BOD Meeting of the ETDB on 23 June, 2023 and highlighted the role of ETDB.

2. Bottlenecks / impediments

The legal instrument of the Bank arguably prevents it from functioning as a trade supporting Bank. This deficiency should be rectified either through necessary amendments or alternative interpretation of the instrument.

The Bank is still far from implying impression for the whole ECO Membership as an important and effective trade promoter in the Region.

3. The Way Forward

As foreseen in the Vision Implementation Framework, there is a need for continued regular consultations among decision makers within ECO on how to strengthen the role of ECO Trade and Development Bank as well as to expand its membership. This may require amendments to the founding documents of the Bank.

15th ECO Summit: Honourable ECO leaders also emphasized on the urgent need for reinforcing and strengthening the role and impacts of the ECO-TDB through strengthening its institutional and financial capacities.

Vision Expected outcome viii:

Capacity Building Programmes for TradePromotion Organizations of the Member Countries will be prepared and executed.

1. Stocktaking and progress made

The Vision Implementation Framework has given the task to the Trade Promotion Organizations Forums (TPOF) to define and elaborate ECO calendar of trainings and capacity building programmes. Since adoption of the Vision, TPOF has not been convened regularly. The Secretariat has pursuing with UNIDO to implement the fourth phase of the Joint ECO-UNIDO Trade Capacity Building Project. Meetings were held with UNIDO representative in Tehran (in person) in 2022 as well as UNIDO Staff in their HQs in virtual format in 2023. Besides the Secretary General, ECO also approached DG UNIDO through letter, who assured to collaborate with the ECO Secretariat. A project document was shared with UNIDO for their comments and making commitment for allocation of the funds amounting to US\$ 500,000. UNIDO has

requested the Secretariat to make allocation for the project as seed money. Response from UNIDO is awaited. Meanwhile the Secretariat has initiated Small Size Capacity Building Project on “Train the trainers Program” For ECO Member States on “International Standards and International Standardization” with a view to build up the capacity to benefit from Fourth Phase of ‘Joint ECO-UNIDO Project.’

2. Bottlenecks / impediments

As mentioned before, the TPOF needs to be organized and give serious care to this important pending part of the Vision. Moreover, and as per 31st RPC recommendation, the Secretariat is still awaiting the Member States to share their needs for training and capacity building.

3. The Way Forward

Member States, including the ECO business community, will be invited to assist the Secretariat in identifying the needs and priorities of the target groups and end-users of these trainings and programmes. The ECO TPOs will be encouraged to meet regularly and take over their tasks as per Vision Implementation Framework.

Vision Expected Outcome ix:

Regional trade exhibitions and fairs will be organized.

1. Stocktaking and progress made

The Vision Implementation framework has envisaged ECO Trade Fairs/Exhibitions to be developed and organized by TPOs and ECO Chamber of Commerce and Industry. These events have ever since been on the annual ECO calendars, including in the Calendar of Events 2021.

2. Bottlenecks / Impediments

Lack of interest on the part of the Member States to offer to host the events has been among the reasons delaying fairs and exhibitions.

The ECO CCI could not take an active role to conduct a trade promotion event. The ECO CCI has not been active during the year 2023 to arrange any trade promotion activity

The 4th ECO Business Forum was held in Ashgabat on 26th November 2021

on the sidelines of 15th ECO Summit and the 5th ECO Business Forum was held in Tashkent on 8th November 2023 on the sidelines of the 16th ECO Summit.

3. The Way forward

ECO TPOs in coordination with ECO-CCI should push for early organization of the trade fairs and exhibitions. As mandated by Vision, programmes for Media need to be crafted and implemented by individual Member States and ECO-CCI to utilize their role for promotion of regional trade and economic activities.

Vision Expected Outcome x:

A robust trade financing programme will be launched for enhancing regional trade.

1. Stocktaking and progress made

The Vision 2025 has envisaged close consultation between Secretariat and the ECO Bank to ensure timely realization of a trade financing programme for the Region. By 2020, it was expected to launch a feasibility report on an electronic trading platform to be assessed by the Member States. This is not yet the case.

As regards the Vision mandate on a robust regional financing programme, the ECO Secretariat held meetings with the ECO Bank for the necessary coordination and collaboration. The President of the ECO TDB visited the Secretariat and held meeting with the Secretary General ECO. The discussion revealed the existing regulations do not allow the ECO TDB to cater the needs for regional financing system. The Bank was invited to finance some regional projects but the bank has refused citing their mandate under the Bank's regulations

As a new initiative, the Secretariat recently circulated a draft text of the framework agreement for setting up and ECO Clearing Union (ECU). As regards the initiatives on ECU and regional payment system, the lack of interest from the Member States has left the initiatives dry as the essential meetings could not take place.

In parallel, the ECO Heads of Sovereign Wealth (SW)/National Development Funds (NDFs) started discussions on possible regional networking for financing regional bankable projects and the required regional infrastructure to support it. For the initiative of networking among Sovereign Wealth (SW)/ National Development Fund (NDF) of the ECO Member States,

and the *1st Meeting of the Heads of SW/NDFs of the ECO* was held on 16th December 2020. The meeting, inter alia mandated the Secretariat to carry out a Research Study on Institutionalization of networking of SW/NDFs of the ECO Member States. The Secretariat conducted the study and shared its report with the Member States and comments have been received from I.R of Iran.

The Secretariat has also conducted a small scale study project on a possible regional payment system which is aimed to simplify the process for clearance of trade-related payments implying predictability, uniformity and transparency.

In order to promote confidence of the investors for investment in the ECO region two meetings of the Heads of SEZs of the ECO Member States have been held to harmonize investment policies through networking of SEZs/FTZs of the ECO member states. The First Meeting Heads of SEZs of the ECO Member States was held on January 7, 2021 whilst the second meeting of the Heads of SEZs/FTZs was held in August 2, 2021. The Secretariat has received nominations for the Standing Committee from Republic of Azerbaijan, I.R of Iran, the I.R of Pakistan and Republic of Tajikistan, Republic of Türkiye and Republic of Uzbekistan and Joint Commission from Republic of Azerbaijan, I.R of Iran, the I.R of Pakistan and Republic of Tajikistan, Republic of Türkiye.

2. Bottlenecks and Impediments

Major bottlenecks include, but not limited to a lack of interest to join the initiatives, lack of confirmation to participate in the meetings leading to quorum problem, lack of ownership of the decisions of the meetings and absence of their follow up, long wish list of different initiatives/ agreements/ projects obscuring focus on core areas and frequent changes in focal points/ experts in Member States dealing with the are some of the bottle necks.

3. The Way Forward

The higher fora should revisit the regulations of the ECO TDB to align Bank's role with the Vision mandate on designing a regional trade financing programme. The initiative on SW/NDFs and the RPS/ ECU may be revisited and interest of the Member States may be evaluated for pursuing them or closing them to focus more on core issues.

The Secretariat will continue its follow-up with the central banks of the Member States to activate the Expert Group Meeting on Establishing ECU. After recommendations about the setting up of ECU by the Expert Group Meeting, the Secretariat will share the ToRs of the study to prepare a roadmap and an

action plan for establishing the ECO Clearing Union (ECU) with the ECO TDB to allocate funding to carry out the study and the report of the study will be circulated to the Member States to finalize the framework agreement for setting up the ECU.

As mentioned above and as alternative measure for trade financing, the Secretariat has taken I.R of Iran has offered to host the *2nd Meeting of the Heads of SW/NDFs of the ECO* on 20th November 2023 to set up a regional financing programme for regional projects to meet the targets of the ECO Vision 2025.

The Secretariat will also conduct a small scale study project on preparation of a roadmap and action plan on establishment of a network of the selected special economic zones (SEZs) in the ECO Member States as per recommendation by the 32nd RPC. The ToRs have been circulated among the Membership but views/comments have been shared from only by the Republic of Türkiye which have been circulated among the Member States, whilst the remaining Member States have been requested to share their comments.

14th ECO Summit: Some ECO leaders also emphasized on new initiatives in ECO such as ECO Clearing Union.

INVESTMENT

**Vision Expected Outcome xi:
(S. No. xvii was previously placed at A&I Directorate)**

The Agreement on Promotion and Protection of Investment among ECO Member Countries (APPI) will be operationalized and its membership will be increased.

**Vision Expected Outcome xii:
(S. No. xviii was previously placed at A&I Directorate)**

Legal regimes and mechanisms to enhance investor protection will be improved.

The Agreement on Promotion and Protection of Investment (APPI) in the ECO region was finalized by the 3rd High Level Expert Group Meeting held in Istanbul on 5 July 2005. Currently, the Agreement has been signed by five ECO Member States and ratified by four of them namely, Islamic Republic of Afghanistan (signed/ratified), Republic of Azerbaijan (signed), the Islamic Republic of Iran (signed/ratified), the Islamic Republic of Pakistan (signed/ratified) and the Republic of Turkey (signed/ratified). The Agreement came into force after two months of the date of deposit of fourth Instrument of Ratification on 2022 when ratified by the Republic of Türkiye. The 34th RPC called upon the Member States, which have not signed the APPI, to sign the agreement along with ratification of its Amendment Protocol at the earliest convenience. It called upon the Republic of Azerbaijan to complete ratification procedures for the agreement.

B: TRANSPORT AND CONNECTIVITY

Vision Expected Outcome i:

Regional transit transport infrastructure will be improved to bridge gaps and interconnect the Member Countries and the region with neighboring regions and to reach international markets.

1. Stocktaking and progress made

The Vision 2025 has envisaged some concrete actions to be taken by 2025 and beyond. There have been some achievements by the time of this mid-term review. An envisaged regional partnership forum sponsored by ECO-TDB with the participation of international financial institutions and donor community has not been organized yet.

As regards more interconnections of the rails and roads among Member States as well as completion of the missing links:

- Study projects on ITI, KTAI road corridors and commercialization KTI railway corridor, Bandar-Abbas – Almaty, Istanbul-Almaty railway corridors have been conducted,
- MoU on KTI corridor for establishment of Corridor Management Mechanism (CMM) has been finalized,
- The GIS platform is operationalized and ready to serve the MS,
- Truck and train test runs on different corridors have been conducted,
- A few test runs on new corridors are planned and underway;
- ITI road and rail corridor has been activated in October 2021.
- Establishment of ECO Air Hubs in Gabala and Samarkand.
- Establishment of KUTIT and TUTIT Corridors.
- The Secretariat has further institutionalized its relation with the international partners including IRU, ECE, ESCAPP, OTIF and UNOHRLLS and IsDB.

2. Bottlenecks/impediments

One of the most important factors impeding construction of important missing links has proved to be the “lack of finance”. Restrictions for banking transactions due to some sanctions constitute another impediment to realization of the expected outcomes so far.

Technical impediments to this also come from different sources, for example, lack of integrated corridor management mechanism (CMM), as well as slow pace of information flow between Secretariat and the Member States and among Member States.

3. The Way Forward

The Vision's envisaged a fund-raising forum should be organized by ECO-TDB in collaboration with 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 shall-be mandated to facilitate transfer of resources/payments related to regional connectivity and ECO transit transport infrastructures.

A permanent and functioning corridor management mechanism should be designed and tailor-made for ECO corridors. This requires a joint and serious work by the ECO Secretariat and railway/road authorities and private sectors of the Member States as well as relevant international organizations.

To remove delayed information flow some digital platforms and means need to be designed and utilized within ECO.

Addressing a pending mandate of the Vision on enhancing pre-shipment facilities, the Secretariat will conduct a study on need-based technical and financial assessment for installing transshipment facilities, instruments and tools in railway stations across corridors.

- **16th summit (Tashkent):** stressed on Strengthening transport and communication connectivity;
- full utilization of the potential of transcontinental transport corridors that pass through our territories and link us with major markets in the Asia-Pacific region, South Asia, the Middle East, and Europe;
- launch of the China-Kyrgyzstan-Uzbekistan and Trans-Afghan multimodal roads;
- development of "Uzbekistan - Turkmenistan-Iran-Türkiye" Transport Corridor;
- Azerbaijan underlined that its transport-logistics infrastructure is accessible to the ECO Member States (utilization of East-West, North-South transport corridors)
- Azerbaijan also stressed strengthening and completing regional connectivity networks, developing cooperation in transit
- Tajikistan expressed its intention to make a remarkable contribution to the development of the sector, including the East-West and Central Asia - South Asia directions, and also development of the route Tajikistan-Uzbekistan-Turkmenistan-Iran-Turkey (TUTIT) with access to China to help increase the efficiency of the Trans-Caspian East-West Middle Corridor

- Türkiye underscored the creation of economic corridors in the ECO region; and also cooperation in the construction of significant infrastructure facilities - roads, bridges, interchanges, warehouses, terminals and others;
- creation of joint transport and logistics centers with the participation of relevant state core sectors and private companies;
- to conduct more focused and coordinated transport diplomacy in the international arena

Vision Expected Outcome ii:

Existing ECO Corridors will be operationalized and commercialized to enable increased intra and inter-regional trade.

1. Stocktaking and progress made

The following steps seem to have been taken by the time of the mid-term review:

- i. Public sector tariffs on ITI rail corridor are now consolidated for the forwarders.
- ii. MoU on KTI corridor, including on tariff mechanism is now finalized.
- iii. Study project on commercialization of KTI rail corridor is conducted.
- iv. Study on ITI and KTAI corridors are conducted.
- v. Two truck test runs on KTAI have been conducted.
- vi. A visa scheme on ITI and KTAI road corridors have been finalized and agreed.
- vii. The extension of ECO Corridors to Europe and China and other neighboring destinations are on the agenda and Bulgaria has agreed to accede to the ITI train services.
- viii. A coordination Committee is established with UNECE focusing on further development of the Trans Caspian and Almaty- Tehran- Istanbul Corridors.

2. Bottlenecks/impediments

The lack of well-formulated and functional Corridor Management Mechanism, corridor-specific or ECO-wide, proved to be problematic. Besides, lack of/low level participation of relevant stakeholders (particularly private sector) in the management of the existing railway corridors seems to have adversely affected the achievements.

Another impediment proved to be challenging is the predominant traditional customs procedures as well as infrastructural restrictions at border crossing points.

3. The Way Forward

Some more study projects, including on development of economic corridor along KTI railway corridor, establishment of direct air flights among tourist destinations within ECO region, development of Corridor Management Mechanism (CMM) for ITI and KTAI and other existing corridors such as Bandar-Abbas – Almaty, Istanbul-Almaty and KUTIT and TUTIT are in the pipeline.

Concurrently, there is a strong need for closer cooperation among the relevant Member States and other stakeholders to provide necessary support and inputs for realization of the envisaged requirements, including corridor-specific Management, incorporating all trade, customs, regulatory, institutional, etc. aspects necessary for effective operation and commercialization of the corridors. Modernization of customs control systems and border crossing points as well as implementation of visa scheme also deserve instant attention.

- **16th ECO Summit:** stressed on Strengthening transport and communication connectivity and full utilization of the potential of transcontinental transport corridors that pass through our territories and link us with major markets in the Asia-Pacific region, South Asia, the Middle East, and Europe;

Vision Expected Outcome iii:

Transport-related facilitative harmonized regulatory frameworks will be developed/supported.

1. Stocktaking and progress made

The most important ECO regulatory transport-related framework, namely, Transit Transport Framework Agreement (TTFA) still lacks full membership. Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan, two important transit countries in the ECO, have not yet acceded to the Agreement. The more inclusive the TTFA becomes, the more harmonization can be guaranteed.

- Encouraging Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan to accede to TTFA
- Organizing Customs Committee of the TTCC
- Organizing workshop on eTIR and eCMR
- Organizing capacity building on cross border facilitation

2. Bottlenecks/impediments

Besides TTFA deficiencies referred to above, the two different standards (COTIF and OSJD) governing the rail transport in the region, and non-digitalized transport and transit procedures in the region also constitute impediments facing regional

harmonization and facilitation. Implementing the eTIR and eCMR protocols will further contribute to facilitation of transport procedure.

3. The Way Forward

In the remaining time of the Vision 2025 and beyond the ECO should continue towards full membership of TTFA; unification of rail standards, including across certain rail corridors; digitalization of procedures, including through capacity development programmes and application of eTIR and eCMR, etc.

Member States should also be assisted 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) as well as Unified railway Law:

- **The 16th Summit:** highlighted the need for an integrated system of communications and transport in promoting trade, and further continuation of ECO's corridor-based approach and establishment of more TIR crossings;
- building genuine regional transport and transit system in the ECO region;
- development of multimodal transport, logistics, creation of green transport corridors and the digitalization of transport systems in ECO region; and also welcomed the development of the International North-South Transport Corridor;

Vision Expected Outcome iv:

ECO Member Countries will be encouraged to accede to relevant regional and international legal instruments for ease of transit transport.

Please see explanations under Vision Expected Outcome iii.

Vision Expected Outcome v:

Administrative procedures and controls in inter-regional transport will be streamlined and simplified within the framework of TTFA.

1. Stocktaking and progress made

By the time of review, efforts have been done to further simplify and streamline procedures at the ECO region. All ECO Member States have acceded to the TIR customs convention and it is now ~~observed~~ implemented across the Region. Pakistan and Afghanistan have acceded to COTIF convention on rail transport, and Afghanistan has joined OSJD Convention.

The Secretariat in collaboration with UNECE will organize a workshop on Unified Railway law that intends to further facilitate railway transportation.

2. Bottlenecks/impediments

The Region still suffers from lack of effective implementation of regional and international transit facilitation instruments. Border crossing points lack modernized infrastructures and equipment which lead to slow and time consuming customs operations.

Establishment of interoperable and harmonized systems of transport and transit software platforms is also a major need for smooth transit operations. Therefore there is need for technical exchange of views in establishment of such systems among the member States.

3. The Way Forward

Besides some relevant issues mentioned above (under other vision expected outcomes) there should be real focus on implementation of customs provisions of TTFA, as well as ECO Guidelines on Facilitation of Transit under COVID-19.

The border crossing infrastructure and equipments shall be developed further to meet the increasing demand for the regional and international trade requirements.

More technical meeting on harmonization and interoperability of the software systems are required.

- **The 16th Summit:** highlighted the need for an integrated system of communications and transport in promoting trade, and further continuation of ECO's corridor-based approach and establishment of more TIR crossings;
- building genuine regional transport and transit system in the ECO region;
- development of multimodal transport, logistics, creation of green transport corridors and the digitalization of transport systems in ECO region; and also welcomed the development of the International North-South Transport Corridor;

Vision Expected Outcome vi:

More efficient customs functions and modernized customs facilities in Member Countries will be supported.

1. Stocktaking and progress made

- A technical committee on ITI BCPs is established

- Regular visit to BCPs are planned by relevant ECO and MS
- Renovation and reconstruction of some of the BCPs are on the Agenda of the ECO secretariat
- Organizing Customs Committee of the TTCC
- Organizing workshop on eTIR and eCMR
- Organizing capacity building on cross border facilitation
- Digitalization of transit procedures are being followed up

2. Bottlenecks/impediments

Besides those mentioned under relevant vision expected outcomes above, the lack of tailor-made trainings and knowledge about digitalized information exchange systems; different national policies and practices; and lack of funds to support modern customs control devices are among impediments facing full realization of this expected outcome.

3. The Way Forward

Efforts should be directed towards capacity development programmes for application of digital tools, including through workshops and field visits; harmonization among national policies with internationally accepted norms and practices; and mobilization of funds to afford needed customs control equipment/infrastructure and risk management tools.

- **The 16th Summit:** highlighted the need for an integrated system of communications and transport in promoting trade, and further continuation of ECO's corridor-based approach and establishment of more TIR crossings;
- building genuine regional transport and transit system in the ECO region;
- development of multimodal transport, logistics, creation of green transport corridors and the digitalization of transport systems in ECO region; and also welcomed the development of the International North-South Transport Corridor;

Vision Expected Outcome vii:

Simplified visa and consular procedures for transit related activities and regionally or globally accepted insurance system will be activated in line with TTFA.

1. Stocktaking and progress made

As mentioned earlier, one achievement in terms of visa facilitation realized since inception of ECO Vision 2025 is finalization and approval of the Visa Scheme on ITI and

KTAI Road Corridors. This will hopefully accelerate efforts to do the same in the context of other ECO corridors.

A meeting of consular officials is planned to address the Visa issue.

2. Bottlenecks/impediments

Along with other difficulties emanating from Covid-19, entry of transit drivers to some of Member States have been interrupted during the pandemic. Another bottleneck is attributed to the lack of data on professional transit drivers/persons involved in transport allowing them to enjoy from facilitative visa procedures.

3. The Way Forward

The en-route Member States need to operationalize Visa Scheme across ITI and KTAI road corridors. All Member States should seriously consider application of visa scheme to all corridors in the Region.

As per data exchange, the Member States may prepare and exchange list of their professional transit drivers/persons involved in transport, including by professional associations through establishing a web platform.

As regards activation of an insurance system in the ECO, the Green Card/White Card insurance system are in the pipeline to support and supplement the national insurance coverage of the Member States with the ultimate goal of facilitation of intra-regional transport and transit.

COMMUNICATION

Vision Expected Outcome viii¹: *Access and increased use of ICT through increasing household and individual access to internet will be encouraged.*

Vision Expected Outcome ix: *Digital divide will be bridged through minimum provisioning of affordable high-speed internet access and enhancing the abilities of individuals.*

Vision Expected Outcome x: *Development and increased availability of digital local content will be encouraged. Efforts will be made to strengthen on-line trust and security for communities and businesses.*

Vision Expected Outcome xi: *ICT infrastructure will be improved through implementation / adoption of new technologies and regulatory reforms will be encouraged for increasing competition and access of private sector in provision of ICT services.*

Vision Expected Outcome xii: *Institutional framework of ICT sector, development of digital literacy, skills and competencies in the region will be improved.*

1. Stocktaking and progress made

~~Generally, the ECO has been quite slow in materializing envisaged outcomes under Vision.~~ The Third meeting of ICT Ministers of the ECO was convened in 2023 in Tehran and took stock of achievements done since first and second Ministerial Meeting in 2012 and 2017 in Tehran and Baku. Subsequently, the “2025 ECO Regional Strategy for Information Society Development” and its proposed Action Plan were prepared and will play as a framework for ICT development in the region. ~~for their consideration.~~ The First ICT Working Group was organized by Pakistan in October, 2021 virtually to discuss implementation of the decisions of the ministerial meetings and the “2025 ECO Regional Strategy for Information Society Development”.

It is decided that future meetings of the working group will discuss thematic issues of the “2025 ECO Regional Strategy for Information Society Development” and the relevant action plan.

The HLWG of Regulatory Authorities was established by the 3rd Ministerial Meeting on ICT in 2023 that will further help regional interactions.

The 3rd Ministerial meeting has identified and recommended new areas of cooperation particularly on space technology, AI and IoT, development of fiber optics lines and other important areas.

2. Bottlenecks/impediments

The ECO region still lacks intra-regional dialogue and debate among policy makers, academia, practitioners and IT societies. Different level of ICT development of individual Member States, absence of regional ICT institutions involving major stakeholders, lack of a regional ICT cooperation framework and Secretariat's difficulties with regard to lack of human and financial resources in TC directorate are among factors affecting a successful ECO ICT profile.

3. The Way Forward

Regular meetings of the group on ICT cooperation shall be arranged for Member States to discuss ways and means to push for ICT and digital cooperation at ECO level. This includes, among others, implementation of the Regional Strategy for Information Society Development and its Action Plan.

The HLWG of Regulatory Authorities, is expected to perform as a dialogue platform to facilitate regional cooperation, exchange of knowledge through establishment of digital help desks, capacity development and training programmes, conducting studies on issues of interest and concern, and enhancing cooperation with other regional and international organizations, particularly ITU are among issues to be pushed for in the remaining Vision time and beyond.

There should also be incentives and encouragement by governments to facilitate private sector's contribution including encouraging them to provide local internet contents in different languages across the region.

Secretariat also needs to be supported by financial resources and expertise.

16th summit (Tashkent): stressed on strengthening transport and communication connectivity and highlighted the need for an integrated system of communications and transport in promoting trade,

C. ENERGY

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

1. Stocktaking and progress made

The establishment of ECO Regional Electricity Market (ECO-REM) has been a flagship energy project within the Organization for almost a decade. The subject project is instrumental for a long-term energy connectivity and sustainability in the ECO Region. Regrettably, it has long been in standstill without any tangible progress. The ECO Secretariat continued its efforts over the past years to lay ground for launching the Feasibility Study of this project.

The Roadmap on realization of ECO-REM in 2021-2022 was adopted at the 4th ECO Energy Ministerial Meeting, held online in June 2021. Following the Secretariat's engagements and consultations with the international partners, a dialogue with UNESCAP started in 2022 with a view to advance the project. In the end of 2023, ESCAP expressed readiness to render technical and financial support in launching and implementation of its Feasibility Study. This partnership envisages aligning the ECO-REM with ESCAP's 'Regional Roadmap on Power System Connectivity: Promoting Cross-border Electricity Connectivity for Sustainable Development'. ESCAP's Project "Energy connectivity for sustainable development" covers all 10 ECO Member States and is sought to replace the feasibility of ECO-REM. The ultimate goal of ESCAP's aforementioned project is to deliver a set of targeted, actionable recommendations for policy and regulatory reforms that would enable the establishment of multilateral, multi-directional power trading at sub-regional levels. The Project deliverable is expected to be presented in November 2024.

2. Bottlenecks/impediments

The advancement of ECO's regional energy agenda needs enhanced ownership and active involvement by all stakeholders. It is more pertinent with respect to the ECO-REM Project. **Insufficient engagement of the Member States and financial constraints** constitute the major impediments to achieve this expected outcome of the Vision.

The development of ECO-REM encounters numerous challenges that must be addressed to realize its objectives fully:

- **Diverse regulatory frameworks** (diverse legal requirements, standards, and procedures create barriers to harmonization).

- **Infrastructure development** (insufficient infrastructure, including inadequate transmission capacity and interconnection facilities constrains the effective development of the power market and market integration).
- **Institutional arrangements** (building institutional capacity and strengthening regulatory institutions is an important step for creating a regional electricity market).
- **Market design** (absence of standardized market designs and pricing mechanisms slows down the establishment of efficient and competitive electricity markets).
- **Technical challenges** (rapid technological development and integrating variable renewable energy sources, optimizing grid operations, different electricity grid standards, and ensuring system reliability require innovative technological solutions and operational strategies).
- **Data sharing** (data accessibility and reliability challenges interrupt seamless information exchange among stakeholders).
- **Tariffs** (different tariff structures and pricing mechanisms (including subsidies and cross-subsidies) discourage private investments, undermine market competitiveness among ECO Member States and present obstacles to the harmonization of tariffs).
- **Capacity building on regional power trading** (building human capacity is fundamental to the successful implementation and operation of the regional electricity market, where limited technical expertise, institutional capabilities, and regulatory capacity may slow down this process).

3. The Way Forward

A. Advancement of the project from its current standstill:

The regular dialogue and proactive involvement among the Member States is imperative so that to define ways and means the regional electricity market will be shaped in line with their national and regional interests. At the current stage, the exchange of opinions on the visions of the Member States, and updates of information on technical capabilities and prospects for generation and transportation of electricity are underway through consultation meetings.

A set of joint activities are expected to be carried out in 2024 within the implementation of ESCAP's Project "Energy connectivity for sustainable development". A regional kickoff meeting (24 January), a bilateral and regional consultation meetings on implementation of the project (on 13 February and 2 April, respectively) had so far been convened in virtual mode. In 2024, the 5th ECO Energy Ministerial Meeting and 2nd Experts Group Meeting on establishment of ECO-REM are also expected, which could also be milestones in promoting this crucial project.

ECO Secretariat will continue strong engagement with its international partners to advance the project.

B. Establishment of a regional electricity market in a mid- and long-term perspective:

The following activities could address the aforementioned existing challenges/impediments in establishment of ECO-REM:

- Overcoming regulatory fragmentation requires concerted efforts to align policies, streamline procedures, and establish a common regulatory framework conducive to cross-border electricity trade.
- Addressing infrastructure challenges requires substantial investments in grid expansion, modernization, and interconnection projects to enhance cross-border electricity flows and promote market development.
- Mitigating political and geopolitical risks requires diplomatic engagement and the establishment of institutional mechanisms to create trust and cooperation among the Member States.
- Developing harmonized market frameworks, pricing mechanisms, and regulatory structures supports fair competition and will help attract investments in the region.
- Investing in research, development, and deployment of advanced grid technologies and smart grid solutions can enhance the flexibility, resilience, and sustainability of the energy systems in the region.
- Effective data sharing is essential for facilitating transparent market operations, optimizing resource allocation, and promoting informed decision-making within the ECO-REM. Addressing data sharing challenges requires establishing common data standards, enhancing data collection mechanisms, and promoting data transparency and accessibility to facilitate market efficiency.
- Overcoming tariff harmonization challenges necessitates aligning tariff structures, phasing out distortive subsidies, and implementing cost-reflective pricing mechanisms to ensure fair competition, investment attractiveness, and market efficiency.
- Overcoming capacity building challenges requires investing in training programs and knowledge sharing initiatives, where exchange of best practices with neighbor countries or peers from other regions could become an effective solution.

Vision Expected Outcome ii: *Energy trade, production, consumption and transit patterns will be enhanced.*

Vision Expected Outcome vi: *Promotion of energy investments through advocating innovative incentives and close engagement with regional and global IFIs and development banks will be encouraged.*

1. Stocktaking and progress made

Both expected outcomes envisage leveraging the existing platforms and mechanisms or initiating the new ones with a view to design new projects and activities contributing to energy investments and trade in the ECO Region, through outreach as well. These are explicit examples when the Vision and its Implementation Framework evidently set in motion the ambitious energy agenda. It was expected to support and complement the national policies upon which the ultimate success of the ECO Vision rests. But meanwhile, according to “ECO Vision 2025”, achieving strategic objective in energy, requires a supportive policy environment which shall include, among others, broad political consensus and involvement of all stakeholders.

In “ECO Strategy for Energy Cooperation 2030”, adopted at the 4th ECO Energy Ministerial Meeting, held online in June 2021, the issues related to energy trade and investments were duly reflected, notably within the ‘energy security’, ‘investments’ and ‘downstream energy sector’ components. The 4th Energy Ministerial Meeting also reaffirmed the willingness of the Member States to pursue wider partnership in energy generation, consumption, transit and export among them and beyond.

A number of relevant formats and platforms evidently existed within the ECO framework for unfolding huge partnership opportunities in hydrocarbons and enhancement of ECO cooperation in the fields of upstream and downstream energy (ECO High Level Expert Task Groups (HLETG) on Oil and Gas Pipelines, ECO Public and Private Sector Energy /Petrochemical Consortium/Companies, establishment of Refinery Association in the ECO Region, etc.). The delivery and success of these platforms and mechanisms heavily depend on the resolve of the Member States on how to leverage them.

2. Bottlenecks/impediments

The intra-regional energy trade and investment trends in the ECO Region are ever increasing in the last decade. However, the role of ECO in this process should not be overestimated, while both global and regional inter-governmental organizations (IGOs) across the world have **limited capacities to intervene or play an active role** in promotion of such endeavours. The international financial institutions (IFIs) may engage in the process in its last phase, while galvanizing funding for the international energy infrastructure projects.

Furthermore, **geopolitical dimension and political considerations** prevails over the actual market dynamics or financial realities of different projects, particularly in terms of oil and gas industry in the ECO Region and surrounding geography. As the huge hydrocarbon infrastructure projects represent a critical sensitive element of the regional energy security and almost one of the determinants for state actors' success, **IGOs' intervention have always been of secondary/supplementary character.**

It is also worth recalling that ECO has so far regrettably confronted with serious constraints in advancing its hydrocarbons agenda. Despite the prioritization of, and enormous potential for energy cooperation, little progress has been achieved in this component due to the **high degree of controversies.** We must confess that the Member States were quite reluctant in engagement in oil and gas cooperation within ECO. As a matter of fact, the activities of the ECO High Level Expert Task Groups (HLETG) on Oil and Gas Pipelines could not succeed at all in the past to discharge its mandate in facilitating (i) the realization of the ECO Oil & Gas Pipeline Infrastructure Projects and trade; and (ii) to ensure greater economic value and security of export/import from these forms of energy within/outside the region.

As a result, the lack of active involvement by the Member States, their different regional (ECO-wide) approaches vis-à-vis national energy strategies and other factors have led to **low level of dialogue and interaction** as regards upgrading the energy trade and patterns across the Region. The integration of hydrocarbons to the energy agenda will depend on the interest of the Member States to establish certain extra format in addition to the existing bilateral and multilateral platforms, which may most probably seem overlapping or even controversial (but not complementary in any case) for them.

3. The Way Forward

To avoid these impediments in future, the activities of ECO's existing formats/platforms (Ministerial, High-Level Experts Group on Energy, etc) could target on developing sustainable mechanisms, 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 its robustness and resilience as a whole. Through **contributing to the existing endeavours**, ECO may thereby find its niche based on the realistic re-assessment of its advantages in this complicated regional energy architecture.

Efforts should be concentrated on **consensus re-building on the credibility and collective benefits of regional cooperation** among Member States; since energy cooperation has been acknowledged over and over as a core cooperation area within ECO. This should be seriously taken into account in implementation of the new ECO Energy Strategy and its Action Plan 2030.

To facilitate the implementation of this Strategy, the **designation of national focal points** by the Member States for coordination and overseeing of its in-country components could be undertaken. ECO Secretariat is keen on following-up its implementation in collaboration with national focal points and relevant institutions/authorities of the Member States.

Today, financing in national level and from international donors, including the private sector are the primary sources to launch and implement energy projects within ECO. To enable sustainable energy transition, ECO Energy Strategy proposes **to establish regional financing tool** that will mobilize those funding sources **under one umbrella of ECO Fund for Strategic Investments**. This fund could provide additional support enabling access to finance for projects of regional significance such as renewables, energy efficiency and energy networks.

In general, the expectation is that the Member States can take **a proactive role in enriching ECO's regional energy agenda** via monitoring the ongoing endeavours and initiating new project proposals. **The Action Plan of the ECO Energy Strategy could be a guiding document** in this regard. In order to facilitate its implementation, the Member States are expected to **designate national focal points** to coordinate and oversee the implementation of its in-country components. The coordination of this document shall be pursued by the ECO Secretariat, in collaboration with national focal points and relevant institutions/authorities of the Member States.

Vision Expected Outcome iii: *Enhanced policy coherence for integration and mainstreaming objectives of the SDGs and "UN Sustainable Energy for all" will be encouraged.*

1. Stocktaking and progress made

The "ECO Vision 2025" sets important areas of cooperation at regional and global arena, particularly focusing on the UN "2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development" (2030 Agenda). It is critical to find synergies and promote complementarities between the "ECO Vision 2025" and the 2030 Agenda. In this rationale, ECO has reflected the environment, climate change and biodiversity-related components as cross-cutting areas of cooperation in the Vision, which is enshrined in 3 out of 17 SDGs. The individual ECO Member States, as other UN Members, regardless the contribution of the regional dimension, are pursuing their own policies pertaining to the follow up of the relevant SDGs, "UN Sustainable Energy for All" initiative, as well as ambitious pledges of COP28 of UNFCCC, which advocates universal access to modern energy, doubling the global rate of energy efficiency improvement and tripling the share of renewables in the global energy mix by 2030.

“ECO Strategy for Energy Cooperation 2030” and its Action Plan, adopted at the 4th ECO Energy Ministerial Meeting (June 2021) addresses the objectives of “ECO Vision 2025”, while also reflecting recent trends and developments of the global energy landscape with nexus approach. This Strategy represents a promising instrument to address new dynamics on the global energy landscape, particularly environmental, economic, geopolitical, and financial dimensions. Meanwhile, the Strategy per se, as well as the recent ongoing energy projects and activities within ECO go hand in hand, to a maximum extent, with the 2030 Agenda and the relevant SDGs.

The irreversible energy transformation trend in the ECO Region will have significant political, economic, and social implications encompassing multiple dimensions of sustainable development. The Action Plan stipulates that the ECO Member States should work toward removing barriers to the uptake of cleaner fuels, through such means as the gradual harmonization of its energy mix policies with the SDG-7 related to affordable and clean energy. It also lays down that the fossil energy system can evolve in ways consistent with sustainable development actions. The Action Plan further sets out strengthening the capacity of countries to integrate the ECO Strategy into national development plans and sustainable development strategies. It is noteworthy that ECO-REM Project design (see above, “Expected Outcome i.”) is now also aligned with SDGs, particularly SDG-7 and SDG-13 related to the climate action, thus having a strong reference to deployment of renewable energy sources.

2. Bottlenecks/impediments

The effective implementation of the ECO Strategy for Energy Cooperation and its Plan of Action is expected to galvanize new cooperation avenues and remove some bottlenecks which have negatively affected joint action and mainstreaming SDGs in energy sector.

3. The Way Forward

Over the last decade, Governments, international organizations and other involved stakeholders around the globe are working to find common ground and synergy impacts for delivering the UN “2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development” and SDGs. ECO as a regional intergovernmental organization has been contributing to the foregoing process and exerting consistent efforts for full implementation of its mandate with respect to the relevant goals of the 2030 Agenda. The **proactive cooperative policy with international partners** should be continued with a view to promote and implement the 2030 Agenda in the ECO Member States, particularly with respect to their relevant energy and environment components.

Furthermore, ECO should continue promoting a **balanced and effective integration of all dimensions of sustainable development in its Member States**

through regional cooperation and support practical measures throughout the ECO Region which will ultimately support its Member States in making progress towards implementation of the relevant SDGs. **Stimulating high level policy debates** is critical for development of appropriate frameworks for regional partnerships and formulating policies for accommodating its long term strategies with UN goals.

Vision Expected Outcome iv: *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.*

Vision Expected Outcome v: *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 Center will be established.*

1. Stocktaking and progress made

As known well, ECO has been mainstreaming sustainable energy transition in its overall energy agenda over the past few years. This trend goes hand in hand with both subject Expected Outcomes. The establishment of the ECO Clean Energy Centre (CECECO), being jointly implemented with UNIDO is expected to pave the way for this transformation process. CECECO Project is sought to be implemented in three phases: preparatory, first operational and second operational phases. Currently, the preparatory phase is about to be completed.

On November 27, 2021 the 25th Council of Ministers (Ashgabat, Turkmenistan) adopted the Charter of CECECO and selected the Republic of Azerbaijan to host the Centre. The Charter of CECECO has so far been signed by the Republic of Azerbaijan (8 March 2023) and the Republic of Türkiye (during the 27th COM Meeting in Shusha (Azerbaijan) on 10 October 2023). ECO Secretariat has also received the Note Verbale dated 2 January 2024 on the intention of the Government of I.R. Pakistan to sign the Charter of CECECO. The coordination is underway to find a slot for signing the Charter by Pakistan. Meanwhile, the Interim Director of CECECO was appointed by the host country in the end of 2023.

2. Bottlenecks/impediments

At the current stage, there are two key pending components to be addressed in parallel: **i) regulatory and ii) fund-raising**. The efforts on both tracks are underway for the earliest operationalization of the Centre.

The Charter of CECECO is open for signing and ratification by the Member States. **To enable formal operationalization of CECECO, three Member States should**

sign and ratify its Charter. As mentioned above, only Azerbaijan and Türkiye so far signed it. Upon completion of the relevant regulatory procedures, the inauguration of CECECO is sought to be organized in the course of the next UN Climate Change Conference (COP29) in Baku in November 2024.

As regards fund-raising, UNIDO verbally confirmed its intention to pledge funds once the Centre is operationalized. In January 2024, UNIDO clarified that this funding is to be secured tentatively mid of this year through a proposal being developed with the Austrian Development Agency, even though certain budget is currently available to recruit a technical expert in order to support the project development. The funding decision will be made in parallel with the ongoing legislation process with respect to the entry into force of the Charter of CECECO. Therefore, **it is highly recommended that the Member States and particularly the host country raise extra funds required for its operationalization.**

In general terms, **the Member States are expected 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.

3. The Way Forward

The first and foremost, ECO in collaboration with UNIDO should **finalize the process of establishment of the ECO Clean Energy Centre and make it operational.** CECECO may be inaugurated once three Member States will sign and ratify the Charter of this Centre to procedurally enable its operationalization. Following the inauguration, the Project will proceed to the operational phase, which envisages launching of regional strategic programmes. ECO Member States will evidently avail huge opportunities offered by financial mechanisms of CECECO to conduct valuable sustainable energy transition projects, which will benefit the whole ECO Region. Therefore, **their active engagement in all phases of implementation of the CECECO Project is critical.**

The expectation for 2024 is the gaining of a new momentum in seamless development of the Project. On 17 January 2024 and 15 February 2024, two Ad Hoc Committee meetings on establishment of CECECO were held to monitor the progress and streamline a way forward. The meetings reviewed the possibilities for **uptake of five project proposals, presented by UNIDO and built on success stories across the world, for potential replication in the ECO Region and subsequent implementation by the Centre upon approval.** These project proposals are predominantly expected to scale up deployment of renewables and energy efficiency technologies. The proposals are currently under consideration. As of 18 April 2024, Türkiye and Azerbaijan shared

their respective views and comments on these proposals. Other Member States are expected to do so.

As far as the expected outcome “iv.” on green energy technologies and “vii.” on achievement of energy efficiency goals concern, it is to be mentioned that their successful implementation also heavily depends on developments in CECECO Project.

Vision Expected Outcome vii: *To the widest extent possible, relevant energy efficiency goals and objectives will be achieved at the ECO regional level*

1. Stocktaking and progress made

Energy inefficiency is one of the major challenges confronted by the ECO Region in the energy sector and must be targeted at production, distribution and consumption stages. Even moderate estimates assume that driven by the current state of technology, the average of 30% of energy is currently wasted in the countries of Central Asia due to inefficiency. The successful implementation of this Vision Expected Outcome will heavily depend on advancement of CECECO Project (see above, the Expected Outcomes iv. and v.). Certain project proposals, presented by UNIDO for potential replication in the ECO Region and subsequent implementation by CECECO have strong energy efficiency focus.

2. The Way Forward

With these in mind, the major policies for promoting energy efficiency and energy conservation and carbon finance mechanism can be adopted in:

- Renovation of buildings and strict building codes (e.g. insulation of buildings);
- Eco-design regulations;
- Best Available Techniques (BAT) in Industry;
- Transport electrification, CO² and energy efficiency standards for vehicles.

Significant energy savings are required particularly as the climate change obligations are fulfilled and/or GDP growth increases. In these cases, high investment expenditure is necessary in all major sectors.

ECO Experts Group Meeting on Renewable Energy Sources and Energy Efficiency (EGRES) represents a key 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 mode on April 27, 2022. The 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. The feedbacks of the Member States on the project proposal are awaited.

Vision Expected Outcome viii: *Institutional advisory mechanism will be established for crafting policy linkages*

1. Stocktaking and progress made

Two institutional advisory mechanisms could pave the way in crafting policy linkages. The 1st Meeting of the **ECO Regional Network of Research Institutions/Centers and Think Tanks operating in the field of energy studies** convened in 2021 on the theme of “Formulating Future Energy Strategy of ECO Region and steps ahead: particular emphasis to mainstreaming sustainable energy transition”. Elaboration of ECO Energy Strategy was extensively discussed and contributed to the content wise. This advisory mechanism is also sought to undertake implementation process of the subject Strategy, as well as new ideas and initiatives by the Member States.

Furthermore, one of the recent positive developments in ECO was the smooth consultative process and subsequent decision on the establishment of **the High Level Dialogue Platform (HLDP) on Environmental Cooperation**. Following the initial proposal by the Republic of Uzbekistan at the 15th ECO Summit in Ashgabat in 2021, the HLDP on Environmental Cooperation was finally established in the course of the 26th Meeting of ECO Council of Ministers in Tashkent in January 2023. It is expected that this new mechanism will yield successful outcomes and deliver all expectations (see below ‘Expected Outcome iv.’ of “C. Social Welfare and Environment” of “ECO Vision 2025” for details on HLDP).

2. The Way Forward

The year of 2023 was remarkable in terms of establishment of the HLDP on Environmental Cooperation. The first meeting of this Platform was announced by Uzbekistan to be held in Samarkand in 2024. Currently, the Host Country is expected to convey the exact date and format of hospitality, to be extended to the relevant participants of this meeting. The Member States are expected to make sure the high-level participation in the subject event. Their active engagement in collective environmental and energy action and cooperation in the ECO Region is critical for promoting the ongoing ECO initiatives/projects in this field, addressing the regional and global environmental and energy challenges, and streamlining ECO’s relevant agenda.

D: TOURISM

Recognizing the strategic and pivotal role of the Tourism industry for sustainable socio-economic growth of the ECO Member States as well as incredible cultural affinities and advantages across the Region, tourism was selected a priority development sector in the ECO Vision 2025.

The following expected outcomes were identified by the Vision as achievable by 2025:

Vision Expected Outcome i: *The ECO-Tourism brand through effective mediums at the regional, national and international levels will be strengthened in order to attract first-time and repeat visitors.*

Vision Expected Outcome ii: *Silk Road tourism through cooperation with the international community and relevant organizations will be revived.*

Vision Expected Outcome iii: *Visa facilitation for the citizens of the region.*

Vision Expected Outcome iv: *Tourism activities will be diversified into various niches including; health/medical, ecological, culture, winter, sea, mountain sports, climbing, skiing, desert and religious.*

Vision Expected Outcome v: *In tourism promotional activities, utilization of electronic media will be increased.*

Vision Expected Outcome vi: *Tourism related human resource development and capacity building activities will be promoted.*

Vision Expected Outcome vii: *Relevant rules and procedures in tourism sector will be adopted in the ECO Region.*

Vision Expected Outcome viii: *'Standardization and accreditation bodies' and 'sustainable and green tourism' monitoring mechanisms will be established and improved in collaboration with international tourism bodies.*

Vision Expected Outcome ix: *Private sector and local community involvement in the tourism activities will be strengthened.*

Vision Expected Outcome x: *Diverse means and new solutions will be developed and utilized to address emerging issues and range of markets to best serve the ideals and goals of sustainable tourism in the region.*

1. Stocktaking and progress made

Despite some positive moves since adoption of the ECO Vision 2025, the realization of the Vision Expected Outcomes is still pending. With its huge potential, regional cooperation in tourism sector continues to be a stimulating source for economic growth of the ECO Region and the Member States.

As was the case before adoption of the Vision 2025, the coordination between individual policy frameworks of the Member States with the envisaged regional framework at the ECO level continued to be far from realization. The spread of pandemic also made the Vision expected outcomes less promising particularly during 2020-2022 period.

Since adoption of the ECO Vision, 3 Meetings of the ECO Tourism Ministers took place. The 3rd ECO Ministerial Meeting on Tourism was organized in 2019 in Khujand, Republic of Tajikistan and the ECO Principles for Sustainable Tourism Development in the ECO Region were adopted. The cities of Dushanbe, Tajikistan, Sari and Ardabil, Iran were selected as the ECO Tourism Capitals for the years 2020-2021, 2022 and 2023, and international tourism festival 'Dushanbe - ECO Tourism capital 2020-2021' was held respectively.

Later, the 4th ECO Ministerial Meeting on Tourism was held virtually due to pandemic situation and chaired by the Republic of Uzbekistan in 2022. Within the framework of 4th Ministerial Meeting Samarkand Declaration was adopted and Shahrisabz from Uzbekistan and Erzurum from Türkiye were selected as ECO Tourism Capitals for the years 2024 and 2025 respectively.

The meeting also adopted Road Map on Facilitating Accelerated Recovery, Safe and Sustainable Development of Tourism after COVID-19 in the ECO Region as a post-COVID general framework for cooperation among the Member States. The estimations made by the ECO Secretariat indicate that due to COVID-19 the tourist arrivals to the region shrank by 73% in 2020 and the tourism receipts decreased by 67%.

The 5th ECO Ministerial Meeting on Tourism convened in 2023 in Ardabil, Islamic Republic of Iran, adopting the Ardabil Declaration and selected Shusha from Azerbaijan as the ECO Tourism Capital for 2026. The ECO Secretariat also reported on Progress of the Implementation of the Road Map on Facilitating Accelerated Recovery, Safe and Sustainable Development of Tourism after "Covid-19" in the ECO Region to the Meeting.

The ECO Tourism Capitals has become the one of the most prominent initiatives of the ECO for tourism sector since it has been widely acknowledged by the tourism authorities of the Member States providing a significant opportunity to promote lesser

known touristic and cultural destinations of the Member States, as well as to involve private tourism stakeholders and local communities in tourism activities of the ECO.

Some activities and events were also planned, but many of them not realized mostly because of the negative impacts of the pandemic, particularly between 2020-2022. The activities such as the Confobition on Health Tourism, ECO International Tourism Exhibition, International ECO/ Silk Road Food Festival, Expert group meeting on Ecotourism have not been held.

Along with the recovery from the pandemic, some events such as the 5th Ministerial Meeting on Tourism and the 1st Meeting of Tourism Specialized Education Institutions of the ECO Member States were held physically in 2023. At the meeting of tourism education institutions, in which mostly academicians from the ECO region participated, it was decided to establish the ECO Tourism Educational Network (ECO-TEN) to carry out joint studies on tourism education among the Member States. The ECO Secretariat also attempts to facilitate the training opportunities that the Member States can offer to the relevant stakeholders in the Region according to their capacities and to train the human resources needed by the sector.

ECO Ecotourism Database, Ecotourism Catalogue for the ECO region, ECO Tourism Destinations Data banks, ECO Regional Action Plan for Sustainable Tourism Development, launch of a tourism specialized website to increase the online presence of the tourism products of the Member States are also under way, and they have been mostly waiting for the approval or the inputs of the Member States.

The project regarding the tour operators' chain and connectivity has been completed with the establishment of the ECO Tour Operators' Network in 2022. Currently, Network has more than 350 representatives of tour companies from 9 of the ECO Member States and the Network has come together with periodical meetings as well as the members of the Network are able to interact with Whatsapp and Facebook groups. However, process of development and implementation of the ECO Tourism Routes and Packages is still ongoing.

In order to engage the Member States to the issues in tourism related areas the ECO Secretariat has set up different task forces and working groups. In particular, the ECO Tourism and Transport Task Force has been established and the ground has been prepared for the generation of ideas for mutually supportive activities of the two sectors which are closely related to each other.

The ECO Working Group on Tourism Standardization has also been set up and a draft document on the establishment and implementation of sustainable tourism criteria for Tourism Accommodation Facilities in the ECO region has been prepared. This

Working Group in close contact with the Global Sustainable Tourism Council (GSTC) explored possibilities for cooperation on standardization for sustainable tourism.

2. Bottlenecks and impediments

Secretariat identifies the followings as the main challenges facing the Organization in realization of Vision expected outcomes: poor contribution/cooperation of Member States as regards activities/projects (*For example, ECO High Level Expert Meeting on Visa Facilitation and ECO Silk Road Task Force meetings scheduled in 2022-2023 several times yet they were postponed due to lack of quorum*), delayed sharing of necessary documents and other information, insufficient support in hosting the meetings/events, financial restrictions/constraints, lack of concerted regional strategic approach and actions for cooperation in tourism sector, etc.

Regional infrastructure and policy weaknesses and constraints, as well as weakness in transport connectivity, marketing and branding, tourism facilitation, and cooperation between public and private tourism authorities and local community of the Region are among the impediments facing tourism sector boost in the ECO Region. Moreover, the devastating COVID-19 impact on the tourism industry globally exacerbated the prospects in the ECO Region as well.

3. The way forward

Besides regular efforts for preparation of tourism strategy, sharing information between the Member States and the ECO Secretariat, financial support, promotional activities, etc. the ECO as a whole (all stakeholders in the Member States, Secretariat) need to focus on operational and policy measures leading to, among others, enhanced intra-regional connectivity (air, road and rail) along with facilitation of border crossing and tourist-friendly visa regimes, particularly between tourist sites across the Region, improved tourism marketing and branding, improved quality and standards in tourism services, and enhanced cooperation and partnership between public and private sectors and authorities.

These measures should entail policy, institutional, regulatory, promotional and operational coordination among the Member States, as well as partnership and assistance sought from the outside the ECO. Meetings and instruments (strategy, plan of action, etc.) should be arranged and utilized to these ends.

Starting from 2022, the recovery of the ECO region in parallel with the loss of the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic and the recovery of the global tourism sector has also been reflected in the activities carried out by ECO in line with its goals. The fact that the meetings and consultations required for these studies have become physically face-to-face has increased the interaction and the awareness and widened the impact of

ECO tourism projects and initiatives. As a result of this, more than one Member State have announced nominations for the ECO Tourism Capital 2027.

It is crucial to emphasize that Member States seeking advancements in the tourism sector can benefit significantly from the synergy opportunities offered by the ECO. This synergy is based on multilateral cooperation among the ECO Member States, which surpasses individual capabilities. As the host country's achievements, particularly in promotion opportunities and partnerships established across various sub-sectors of tourism, are closely monitored by the representatives of other countries, it becomes evident that collaborative efforts hold great potential.

Global forecasts indicate a continued growth in the tourism industry in the coming years, and the ECO region's importance in these projections is due to its potential and strategic geographical location. This highlights the significance of multilateral cooperation in the tourism sector. To achieve the ECO's targets for this field, it is essential to encourage the private sector to contribute to the ECO activities with its full power. Additionally, fostering cooperation opportunities with international organizations, particularly in terms of financial resources and capacity development, should be prioritized.

E: ECONOMIC GROWTH AND PRODUCTIVITY

AGRICULTURE

Vision Expected Outcome i: *Agriculture Trade-related risk maps (abrupt price and supply changes because of trade and weather conditions) based on studies and analysis will be generated and finalized to identify hazards and their potential routes for being transferred.*

Vision Expected Outcome ii: *Capability of the participating research institutes and local communities will be enhanced for propagation and release of natural enemies of pests and diseases of the selected crops.*

Vision Expected Outcome iii: *A Regional Agricultural Trade Forum will be established to provide a basis for dialogue on agricultural trade policies and joint research on agricultural policy issues under the framework of the existing general trade mechanisms in the ECO.*

Vision Expected Outcome iv: *An Agricultural Trade Information System will be established for the region.*

Vision Expected Outcome v: *Agricultural export potentials of the Member Countries and intraregional agriculture trade potentials will be identified and realized.*

Vision Expected Outcome vi: *Infrastructure requirements in production, processing and export chain of the selected crops will be identified and investment plans will be prepared.*

1. Stocktaking and progress made:

Recognizing the strategic and pivotal role of agriculture for sustainable economic growth and productivity of the ECO Member States, as well as its prominent role in ending extreme poverty, promoting shared prosperity and eradicating hunger, agriculture has been selected as a priority development sector in the ECO Vision 2025.

In line with the objects of the ECO Vision 2025, one of the key expected outcomes of the sector is to enhance food security and safety in the region. In this regard, the ECO Secretariat in cooperation with ECO Regional Coordination Center for Food Security (ECO-RCCFS) and FAO updated the ECO Regional Program for Food Security (ECO-RPFS) according to the post-pandemic situation. The updated ECO-RPFS was adopted during the 7th ECO Ministerial Meeting on Agriculture preceded by 6th High Level Experts Meeting (HLEM) on July 5-6, 2022 in Tashkent, Uzbekistan. The Secretariat in accordance with the ECO-RCCFS makes its utmost to facilitate moving towards the implementation stage aimed at improving and enhancing ECO Member States resilience to future shocks and ensuring food security.

In order to implement the updated ECO Regional Program for Food Security (ECO-RPFS), 4 Steering Committee Meetings of the ECO Regional Coordination Centre (ECO-RCCFS) for Implementation of the ECO-RPFS have been held to date. The 4th Steering Committee Meeting of the ECO-RCCFS for Implementation of the subject program was held on October 6, 2022 in Istanbul, *Türkiye*, *investigating on the ways for effective implementation of the ECO-RPFS* for achieving tangible achievements for benefits of the Member States.

Likewise, the project namely "Transformation of the ECO Regional Coordination Centre for Food Security (ECO-RCCFS) from a programme-based organization into a self-sustainable institution" was concluded in 2023. This project aimed to strengthen ECO-RCCFS's capacity to provide systematic and useful support to its Member States, so that Member States acquire necessary advice, guidance and information for improving their food security and nutrition policies and programs.

ECO Seed Association (ECOSA) in cooperation with the ECO Secretariat took efforts to increase agricultural trade commodities as well as improving the infrastructure of the seed sector in the countries of the ECO region. In order to increase the quality of agricultural productions and seed trade in the ECO region, the ECO Regional Seed Agreement as an outcome of the implementation of the ECO/FAO-SEC (FAO Sub-regional Office for Central Asia) Project was prepared and circulated among Member States for their views and comments and then will be finalized. Likewise, to date, ECOSA and ECO have organized 8 Seed Trade Congresses to improve seed trade in the region. The 8th seed trade conference was held on March 20-21, 2024 in Taraz, Kazakhstan with the active participation of businessmen and stakeholders in seed and agriculture sector from ECO region.

Additionally, ECO Veterinary Commission (ECO-VECO) is the competent body within ECO which is responsible to deal with animal diseases. ECO-VECO aims at achieving very valuable objectives, such as establishing an animal disease surveillance network, collecting information on the existence and outbreak of animal diseases and promoting disease investigation, promoting animal and animal products trade in the ECO Region with removing barriers, issuing common certificate, establishment of slaughtering, and laboratories net works and quarantines check points at the borders in the region. In this regards, two Technical Committee Meetings of ECO-VECO have been held to date. The first Technical Committee Meeting for implementation of the Work Plan of ECO-VECO held on November 15, 2022 and updated the Work Plan regarding priority activities of ECO-VECO. The Second Technical Committee Meeting was held on December 13, 2023 in order to discuss the procedure for implementation of the subject Work Plan. Although ECO-VECO has a salient role in prevention and control of trans-boundary animal diseases, neither institutionalization nor its regular works hasn't been mentioned at all in the targets of ECO Vision 2025. On the other hand, thanks to the enhanced cooperation with FAO and WOAH, regional response to

the trans-boundary animal diseases was significantly strengthened.

ECO Agricultural Bio-Technology Network (ECO-ABN) presents the salient role and prevalent benefits of biotechnology in agriculture including enhancement in crop production with better quality, increase in nutrition value, fresher production and better taste with chemical tolerance and disease resistance. The 2nd Expert Group Meeting of ECO-ABN was held on October 24, 2023 in Tehran in order to investigate the ways for improving regional cooperation in the field of agricultural biotechnology for benefits of ECO member states.

2. Bottlenecks and impediments:

The lack of interest on the part of the Member States to participate in the meetings and events is the main reason for the postponement of the events. Likewise, the active contribution and feedback of the Member States to the circulated correspondence and documents is needed. One of the other most important factors for achieving salient objectives in agriculture section is lack of financial and technical support by the Member States for implementation of the work plans and projects.

Likewise, it is pertinent to mention that the targets and expected outcomes of the ECO Vision 2025 have left out some of the most important issues our affiliated bodies in agriculture section (such as ECO-VECO issues). The Secretariat deemed it appropriate that this is the time we need to review and revise the expected outcomes for agriculture section for the next ECO Vision to make them more practical and to acquire tangible achievements. The expected outcomes should be defined according to the interest of the member states. Additionally, they should have worthy impacts on economic growth, especially with a trade perspective that can improve the trade of agricultural productions in the region.

3. The Way forward:

Regarding the indication of the Islamic Republic of Iran for its readiness for hosting the 8th ECO Ministerial Meeting on Agriculture preceded by 7th High-Level Expert Meeting, the subject events will be held in 2024 in order to improve regional cooperation in addressing food security challenges and resilience to future shocks. Likewise the Secretariat in collaboration with ECO-RCCFS and Member States will implement the ECO Regional Program for Food Security (ECO-RPFS) for benefits of the region. Therefore, the Republic of Türkiye will hold 5th Steering Committee Meeting of the ECO-RCCFS for Implementation of the ECO-RPFS and also, all Member States are requested to be actively involved in activities of ECO-RCCFS for implementation of RPFS.

The ECO-RCCFS will make efforts with the assistance of the Secretariat to produce concrete project proposals for the implementation of the ECO-RPFS to promote coordination and increase synergy in ECO regional efforts and enhance food security through technical cooperation, including institutional capacity development, transfer of technology and increasing agricultural productivity. In this regards, the Secretariat may request the ECO Trade and Development Bank to provide financial support for implementation of the projects in the field of agriculture, food security and RPFS, ECO-ABN, ECO-VECO.

Regarding formation of the Advisory Board of ECOSA, the Member States (except Azerbaijan, *Türkiye* and Uzbekistan) will be requested once again to convey their nominations at the earliest. The Secretariat also requests again from the Member States (except Azerbaijan, Pakistan, *Türkiye* and Uzbekistan) to convey their views and comments on the ECO Regional Seed Agreement for finalization of the said document.

Noting the readiness of the Islamic Republic of Iran for hosting the 4th Meeting of the ECO Heads of Veterinary Organizations, the meeting will be held in 2024 by the Islamic Republic of Iran with the purpose to accelerate the materialization of the objectives of ECO-VECO. Also the Member States will be requested to consider signing/ratifying the Statute of ECO-VECO.

Considering the necessity for acceleration of the activities of ECO-ABN, the Member States will be requested again to consider hosting the 3rd Expert Group Meeting of the ECO Agricultural Bio-Technology Network (ECO-ABN) in 2024 and also contribute to ECO Agricultural Bio-Technology Network with sharing information, studies, inputs, experiences and best practices and conveying/updating their country reports on agricultural biotechnology issues.

It might also be helpful to look at the reasons for the lack of interest on the part of Member States. 4 out of 6 expected outcomes of the Vision document were related to increasing trade in the agricultural sector. Although as a development-oriented Organization it may be considered appropriate to focus on trade, the agricultural sector also contributes enormously to the welfare of the region itself. That's why focusing on the development of the agricultural sector itself, along with increasing the volume of trade, might be a healthier approach for the next term's goals to move forward.

INDUSTRY

Vision Expected Outcome vii: *Green industrial development strategy at regional level will be adopted to contribute to 2030 sustainable development agenda.*

Vision Expected Outcome viii: *Industrial cooperation in the region will be institutionalized.*

Vision Expected Outcome ix: *The share of high-tech products in the production and exports of the Member Countries will be enhanced.*

Vision Expected Outcome x: *Existing industrial capacities will be enhanced and reoriented towards green industrial development to meet the SDG's standards and criteria.*

Vision Expected Outcome xi: *Financial mechanism will be established to support start-ups, SME's and entrepreneurs.*

Vision Expected Outcome xii: *Women entrepreneurship will be promoted and encouraged.*

Vision Expected Outcome xiii: *Legal and administrative support for development of green industries particularly through promotion of Industrial Property Rights will be provided and necessary mechanism will be established and national initiatives will be encouraged.*

Vision Expected Outcome xiv: *Development of quality infrastructure, standards, laws and regulations to make the region an investment friendly atmosphere for green industries and services will be promoted.*

Vision Expected Outcome xv: *Capital flows, and technology transfers from within and outside ECO members will be encouraged.*

Vision Expected Outcome xvi: *New industrial solutions including industrial revolution 4.0 will be utilized to address emerging needs.*

1. Stocktaking and progress made

The procedure for establishment of **ECO Regional Institute for Standardization, Conformity Assessment, Accreditation and Metrology (ECO-RISCAM)** is underway. Activation of ECO-RISCAM is a prominent point in industrial cooperation and trade ties. **To date**, Afghanistan, Iran, *Türkiye* and Pakistan have signed and ratified its Statute. The 7th and 8th HLWG meetings on Standardization, Conformity Assessment, Accreditation and Metrology, the 1st Joint Meeting on activation of four Technical Management Boards (TMBs) and the 1st Meeting of Conformity Assessment TMB were held virtually in previous years. The 9th HLWG Meeting of ECO-RISCAM was held on November 21, 2023 virtually by Iran. The Member States were requested to send their

views on draft basic documents of ECO-RISCAM till February 20, 2024 for its finalization and approval during the First General Council Meeting of ECO-RISCAM, but unfortunately any feedback didn't received. The First General Council Meeting of ECO-RISCAM was arranged by the Islamic Republic of Iran twice in 2023, but postponed due to lack of quorum. The Conformity Assessment TMB, which is located in Iran, has been established and Pakistan and *Türkiye* were requested to establish their relevant TMBs.

The 1st Ministerial Meeting on Industry adopted the Plan of Action for Industrial Cooperation in the ECO Region and providing the guidelines for cooperation of the Member States. In order to implement the Plan of Action on Industry, ECO organized the 2nd and 3rd Ministerial Meetings. Regarding the delay for holding the 4th Ministerial Meeting on Industry, now it's an obligation to have the subject meeting at the earliest. During the recent RPC meetings, the Secretariat requested many times from the Member States to host the 4th Ministerial Meeting and the 3rd HLEG Meeting on Industry. Unfortunately, no Member State indicated its readiness for hosting the 4th Ministerial Meeting on Industry. During the 33rd RPC Meeting, the Islamic Republic of Iran conveyed its offer for hosting the 3rd HLEG Meeting on Industry in 2023, but no feedback was received on the date.

The generous proposal of the Republic of Uzbekistan for hosting the First ECO Interregional Industrial Exhibition in 2024 in Uzbekistan was welcomed by the Secretariat and its details was requested. This Exhibition is expected to serve for institutionalization of industrial cooperation in accordance with expected outcomes. Also, the proposal for hosting the 4th Ministerial Meeting on Industry back to back with the subject Exhibition is submitted to the Republic of Uzbekistan, but no feedback received.

Cooperation on Nanotechnology issues will provide a platform for knowledge-based industries. In this regard, the Secretariat urged the relevant authorities of the Islamic Republic of Iran for hosting the 2nd Steering Committee Meeting on ECO Nanotechnology Network. The subject meeting held on July 10, 2023, with active participation of ECO Member States. During the meeting the Member States welcomed a project proposal namely "establishment of a coordinating and facilitating platform for implementation of Nanotechnology based water treatment pilot plants in ECO". The procedure for providing financial support from the Secretariat for implementation of this project is under way. Utilization of nanotechnology could provide great opportunities for getting advantage of new industrial solutions.

Expansion of SMEs (Small and Medium-Sized Enterprises) in the Member States can provide a suitable platform for production of industrial goods. The Republic of *Türkiye* held *virtually* the workshop namely, "Sharing Best Practices on SME Support and Evaluation Mechanisms" on 23 November 2022. The Islamic Republic of Iran offered, as

well to host the 5th Steering Committee Meeting (SCM) on Entrepreneurship and SMEs Development on April 27-28, 2024, in Tehran, in order to contribute to industrial cooperation and sustainable economic growth in the region. But regarding the lack of quorum of the Member States, the meeting postponed. The Secretariat invites Member States to actively participate in the subject meeting on its fresh date.

Regarding the indication of the Islamic Republic of Iran for hosting the 1st ECO International Innovation & Technology Exhibition (ECO-TEX) on May 7-10, 2024, in Tehran, the Secretariat made its utmost efforts to persuade Member States to actively participate in the mentioned Exhibition, which is a prominent platform for exchange of knowledge and best practices in the field of new technologies.

In respect to the MoU between ECO and WIPO (World Intellectual Property Organization) and their bilateral meeting on 12 September 2023 in Tehran, the ECO Secretariat requested WIPO to host a high-level meeting comprising of Heads of Intellectual Property (IP) Centers/Offices of ECO Member States to promote and foster IP among the ECO State Parties. WIPO welcomed the subject proposal of the ECO Secretariat and the mentioned meeting will be held in 2024 in Tehran. Likewise, the Republic of *Türkiye* proposed to host the 4th Coordination Committee Meeting on Industrial Property Rights in 2023. Then, the host authorities renewed their proposal for its hosting in 2024.

2. Bottlenecks and impediments

Along with all efforts and correspondence of Secretariat to convince Member States for hosting the 4th Ministerial Meeting of Industry, unfortunately any of the countries didn't show their interest on this issue. The most important impediment in Industry Section, which has delayed the pace of development of industrial initiatives and cooperation, is lack of interest of the Member Countries to host or even participate in the relevant events. Another crucial factor for retarding industrial projects is lack of financial and technical support for fulfillment of the projects. Also it seems that the outcomes of the ECO Vision 2025 aren't desirable for the Member States, therefore it is needed to amend the industrial outcomes for the next vision as per the interest of the Member Countries and current activities of the section.

While understanding the need to set more ambitious targets and to pursue the global agenda in visionary documents, the balance between visionary and applicable should also be monitored. Looking more closely at the progress made in the industry section, it could be seen that targets focusing on sustainability or diversification have not attracted the interest of Member States. Although lack of interest does not indicate the unimportance or importance of the issues, it could help us to understand Member States' priorities.

3. The Way Forward

Concerning the ECO-RISCAM activities, it is pertinent that the Member States (except Afghanistan, Iran, *Türkiye* and Pakistan) consider signing/ratifying its Statute to pave the way for early functioning of the Institute. Pakistan and *Türkiye* will be requested *again* to expedite establishment of their relevant TMBs and convey the exact date and details for the first meetings of related TMBs. The Member States should accelerate submission of their views and comments on the draft basic documents of the Institute and also actively participate in the First General Council Meeting of ECO-RISCAM, which will be held by Iran in 2024.

The Secretariat reiterates once again on the need for hosting the 4th Ministerial Meeting on Industry. Additionally, the Islamic Republic of Iran is requested to inform the details of the 3rd HLEG Meeting on Industry. The Republic of Uzbekistan is requested as well, to convey the details for holding the Interregional Industrial Exhibition in 2024 and considering the possibility for hosting the 4th Ministerial Meeting on Industry back to back with the Exhibition.

Noting to the Nanotechnology issues, financial support for the implementation of the proposal namely, "establishment of a coordinating and facilitating platform for implementation of Nanotechnology based water treatment pilot plants in ECO", should be considered. The Secretariat may request the ECO Trade and Development Bank and donors to provide financial support for implementation of the projects in the field of industry and new technologies.

Active participation of the Member States in the 5th Steering Committee Meeting (SCM) on Entrepreneurship and SMEs Development, is needed to improve the cooperation among SMEs in the region. Additionally, regarding the 1st ECO International Innovation & Technology Exhibition (ECO-TEX) on May 7-10, 2024 in Tehran, active participating for this event is also crucial.

The details for 4th Coordination Committee Meeting on Industrial Property Rights by the Republic of *Türkiye* and the First high-level meeting of Heads of Intellectual Property (IP) Centers/Offices of ECO Countries will be shared after receiving of the host authorities in order to achieve the objectives for Industrial Property Rights.

F: SOCIAL WELFARE AND ENVIRONMENT

(Inputs received from HR&SD Directorate)

The Human Resources and Sustainable Development Directorate (HRSD) in ECO Secretariat has been assigned the task for most of the priority areas of the ECO Vision 2025 covered under “Social Welfare and Environment”. In line with the ECO Vision 2025, HRSD Directorate has four main priorities which are sustainable development, disaster risk reduction, health and education.

Education

Vision Expected Outcome i:

Regional mechanisms/frameworks will be in place to support education, training, vocational needs and other capacity enhancement requirements of the peoples/entities of the Member Countries.

1. Stocktaking and progress made

ECO has facilitated various training programs and workshops on this priority area such as “The Workshop on Disaster Risk Transfer through Insurance in the ECO Region” was held virtually on December 13, 2021 and “2nd ECO-EI Forum on Higher Education in ECO Region” with the collaboration of ECO Educational Institute (ECO-EI) was conducted in December 2023.

ECO-EI coordinating with the ECO Secretariat requested from Member States to provide scholarship programs/training courses in sustainable development, disaster risk reduction and health.

In addition, the Secretariat has continued its proactive collaboration with ECO Educational Institute as well as national and international institutions including UNESCO, UNDRR, ESCAP, WHO, IFRC, UNDP, UNESCO, IOM, UNICEF to improve the collaboration in the areas of technical as well as vocational education and trainings.

2. Bottlenecks / impediments

Workshops and training programs regarding the ECO mandates including sustainable development, disaster risk reduction and health in the ECO region may pave the way for a common understanding on these issues.

However, in this respect, it should be considered that more engagement of Member States in ECO-EI matters.

Furthermore, the Secretariat has requested Member States several times to provide the pertinent needs and requirements related to their education sectors enabling the Secretariat to coordinate the development of a “Plan of Action on Education”. However it is still pending.

3. The way forward

To address the above mentioned impediments, it is thought that improving the role of ECO EI in the Region is crucial.

It is considered that regional collaborative engagements for acceleration of activities on education and related training activities, especially with ECO-EI, as well as preparing an “Action Plan on Education” will promote the quality of education in the Region. Therefore, “1th ECO-EI Expert Group Meeting on Education” was included as ECO event into 34th RPC Working Program for 2024.

Health

Vision Expected Outcome iii:

Cooperation, focusing on non-communicable diseases as well as universal health coverage system, will be encouraged.

1. Stocktaking and progress made

The 4th ECO Ministerial Meeting on Health was held virtually on June 2, 2021. The Meeting adopted the ECO Action Plan on Health for ECO Region and mandated the Secretariat to ensure effective implementation of the ECO Action Plan on Health.

The Secretariat circulated the report of the small sized project of “Regional Capacity on Intra-Trade of Pharmaceuticals” and requested from Member States to provide their views and feedbacks on the report in 2021 and nominated relevant person for the establishment of a Task Force dedicated to scrutinizing the report and developing a “Plan of Action on the Trade of Pharmaceuticals within the Region”.

5th ECO Ministerial Meeting on Health was held on May 24, 2023 on the sidelines of the 76th Meeting of World Health Assembly in Geneva under the Chairmanship of the Republic of Azerbaijan. The meeting revised the “ECO Action Plan on Health”.

Secretariat approached relevant international institutions including WHO and IsDB to improve mutual collaboration and for their supports in preparing and implementing regional project proposals in health.

2. Bottlenecks / impediments

The effective implementation of the Action Plan through active participation of Member States in health cooperation especially on non-communicable diseases as well as universal health coverage system are substantial for implementation of the Action Plan on Health.

Creation of regional consultation mechanism for enhancement of technical cooperation on communicable diseases in close collaboration with WHO and other relevant international organizations is substantial for ECO Region.

In this respect, it should be noted that ECO has no signed MoU with the relevant regional offices of WHO.

3. The way forward

“5th Expert Group Meeting on Health” was added to the 34th RPC Work Plan of 2024 to discuss the implementation status of “ECO Action Plan on Health”

“6th Health Ministerial Meeting on Health” preceding the High Level Working Group Meeting (HLWG) will be held in Islamic Republic of Iran. The meeting will discuss the implementation status of “ECO Action Plan on Health” and challenges faced.

Holding Bilateral meetings with WHO country representative for Islamic Republic of Iran as well as WHO's Eastern Mediterranean Region office to prepare a MoU between ECO and EMRO to improve mutual collaboration and for their supports in preparing and implementing regional project proposals in health to achieve health related goals in ECO Region will continue in the upcoming period. It is expected to be signed said MoU during the 6th Ministerial Meeting on Health in Islamic Republic of Iran in 2024.

Sustainable Development

Vision Expected Outcome iv:

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

Vision Expected Outcome viii:

Regional law enforcement and police organizations/mechanisms will be in place to coordinate and support national and international efforts to combat illegal drugs and human trafficking and other trans-regional organized crime.

1. Stocktaking and progress made

Sharing the SDGs by United Nations (UN), ECO has determined “sustainability” as one of the main principles of ECO Vision 2025 to increase standard of living, quality of life, economic welfare and well being of people in the region.

In the 33th RPC Meeting in 2023, the Council requested from the Secretariat to establish a “High Level Sustainable Development Working Group (HLSDWG)/ad-hoc Coordinating Group” as to prepare an “Action Plan” for enhancing policy coherence for sustainable development (PCSD) in the Region.

Establishment of the abovementioned working group was approved by 286th CPR Meeting on April 2024. However, several Member States have not sent yet the contact information of their representatives.

On the other hand, the ECO has recently remained part of number of important events on SDGs and took several initiatives.

2. Bottlenecks / impediments

In the 31th RPC Meeting in 2021, the Secretariat has been instructed to request from Member Countries to provide respective data/documents regarding SDGs along with their updated implementation status in order to prepare a consolidated regional SDGs report along with preparing SDG performance index for the Region. Thereupon, the Secretariat requested from Member States to provide their respective data/documents regarding SDGs. However it is still pending.

Moreover, the 34th RPC Meeting has instructed the Secretariat to conclude preparation of SDG Performance Index for the Region within 2024.

Attaining policy coherence for sustainable development remains crucial to meet the challenges faced by the Member Countries to achieve SDGs and to enhance mutual cooperation while capitalizing on policies and actions already in place at the local, regional and international levels.

The establishment of a “High Level Sustainable Development Working Group (HLSDWG)” is; therefore, key in order to prepare an action plan for enhancing policy coherence for sustainable development (PCSD) over a defined period, compatible with available resources.

3. The way forward

Turkmenistan has officially informed the Secretariat about their intention to host the “1st ECO Forum on Sustainable Development” in 2024. It is believed that this forum will facilitate the preparation of action plan for sustainable development in the ECO Region.

The regional action plan that is considered to be prepared with the cooperation of Member States and international organizations for implementing the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development in ECO Region will support and complement the effectiveness of national mechanisms upon which the ultimate success of the global Agenda for 2030.

Even though “sustainability” is one of the main objectives of ECO Vision 2025, there is no main direct reference to “sustainable development” with some actions in the current Vision document. Therefore, It is kindly recommend to include or change the title of “Social Welfare and Environment” with “Sustainable Development” in the new Vision document. This main title may also cover poverty reduction, income inequality, social protection, migration etc... which are missing issues in the current vision document.

A joint workshop with International Organization for Migration (IOM) on “Trafficking in Persons and Human Smuggling in the ECO Region” will be conducted in 2024. It is considered that this workshop will shed the light on migration which is one of the most challenging issues to achieve SDGs in the Region.

Disaster Risk Reduction

Vision Expected Outcome vi:

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

Vision Expected Outcome vii:

A regional integrated disaster risk reduction system/network will be established with the ultimate aim of preventing and reducing disaster losses in lives, and in social, economic, and environmental assets of people of ECO Member Countries.

1. Stocktaking and progress made

The 8th ECO Ministerial Conference on Disaster Risk Reduction, in 2021, adopted the "ECO Regional Framework on Disaster Risk Reduction" and the Roadmap of Implementing ECORFDRR (2021-2025).

The 1st Meeting of the Senior Officials/Heads of the Disaster Insurance Authorities under the Chairmanship of the Islamic Republic of Iran was held virtually on December 14, 2021. The main aim of the meeting was to analyze the spread of insurance for the coverage of damages deriving from natural disasters.

The Secretariat and UNESCAP subsidiary, the Asian and Pacific Centre for the Development of Disaster Information Management (APDIM) have conducted

negotiations on a joint project on the “Strategic Action Plan for Managing Cascading Risks from Natural and Biological Hazards and Guideline for Implementation”. A consultant has been hired by APDIM for production of the appropriate documents and a training/workshop organized virtually for the ECO Member States, in February 2022.

Strategic Action Plan for Managing Cascading Risks from Natural and Biological Hazards” was prepared by cooperation of APDIM and it was finalized in July 2022.

Draft Statute of the ECO Regional Center for Risk Management of Natural Disasters (ECO-RCRM) was finalized in 26th COM Meeting in Tashkent.

“4th ECO Experts Group Meeting on Disaster Risk Reduction and Implementation of the ECO Regional Framework for DRR” was held in Iran on 26-29 November 2023. The meeting reviewed implementation status of ECORFDRR and take up priority areas for reinvigoration of potential partnership frameworks and key actions for further engagement of regional and global disaster risk reduction.

Bilateral meetings were held with relevant national and international organizations including UNESCAP, UNDRR, ASEAN, APDIM, IFRC, GIS, and IRIMO to enhance the mutual level of cooperation and the Secretariat also took part in the numerous non-ECO events on DRR.

2. Bottlenecks / impediments

Receiving of reports/feedbacks from Member States on implementation status of the ECORFDRR is one of the challenges on this issue. ECO secretariat has receives feedbacks on the implementation status of ECORFDRR from a few member States till now.

3. The way forward

9th Ministerial Meeting on DRR which was incorporated into the 34th RPC Working Plan of 2024 is important for the implementation of ECORFDRR and improve coordination with Member States on the project proposals related to DRR.

Joining of other Member States to the protocol of ECO-RCRM is one of the key issues as well as enhancing collaboration with international organizations such as UNDRR, IFRC and especially ESCAP (as envisioned in MoU) in the upcoming period on DRR.

F: SOCIAL WELFARE AND ENVIRONMENT

(Inputs received from EME Directorate)

Vision Expected Outcome iv: *Environmental sustainability of the region will be supported through environmentally friendly regional economic and social cooperation.*

1. Stocktaking and progress made

The ECO Secretariat during the year of 2023 had quite eye-catching progress in preparing the ground and the intensification of contacts in addressing environmental sustainability in the region. The activities entailed raising awareness on integrating and mainstreaming environmental and climate resilience in development planning, programming, and budgeting of ECO Member States, and stimulating policy debates for developing partnerships to address the environmental challenges/concerns in the ECO Region.

On the initiative of the Republic of Uzbekistan, the High-Level Dialogue Platform (HLDP) on Environmental Cooperation in the ECO Region was set up by the Council of Ministers Meeting (Tashkent, January 2023). This Platform could make a fresh impetus to promoting regional cooperation on the environment. It can make a positive complementary and advisory contribution to the decision-making bodies and existing sectoral platforms of ECO in the field of environment and other cross-cutting sectors. After all, ECO needs to incorporate scientific findings into policymaking that will have long-term benefits for ECO countries from the environmental and energy sustainability perspective. The positive yet innovative practices underpinned by knowledge and science are needed. In such a context, this platform could be very instrumental.

The revision process of the “Framework Plan of Action on Environment Cooperation and Global Warming for ECO Member States (2016-2020)” – which serves as a policy framework for the Organization’s all-inclusive cooperation in different fields/segments of the environment – has been almost concluded. 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 (COP 28 of UNFCCC) in Dubai paved the way, by release of its outcome document - Joint Statement, for the adoption of the new Cooperation Framework and its annexes on climate change and biodiversity, and consolidation and advancement of ECO’s environmental agenda in the light of the rapidly evolving global environmental and climate agenda.

During the Informal Ministerial Meeting, the ECO Secretariat also delivered a detailed presentation on the Regional Initiative on Resource Efficiency, Sustainability,

and Circular Economy in the ECO Region (RESCUE), jointly initiated by the ECO Secretariat and the Chairmanship of Azerbaijan in ECO.

2. Bottlenecks/impediments

The ECO Member States, although to different degrees, are prone to environmental challenges and extreme climate conditions. Addressing them requires not only domestic solutions, but also **trans-boundary responses**.

To support the environmental sustainability of the region, first and foremost, the **realistic assessment of negative factors pulling Member States in the region away from collaboration** is needed. As a matter of fact, ECO encounters **weak engagement of the Member States** in issues related to environmental sustainability. ECO suffers from a chronic challenge even in **achieving a quorum for arranging the ECO events** in different sectors and convening ministerial meetings regularly. The environment-related events are not an exception.

To deliver on the environment, beyond convening meetings and creating new bodies and platforms, **strong political will and collective and concerted actions by all the ECO Member States** are required. We need a whole-of-government approach rooted in a solid political will as well as a whole-of-society approach combined with adequate financing, and positive practices underpinned by knowledge and science which are missing at the current stage.

ECO still suffers from the lack of progress rooted in different inefficiencies including the **low speed of communications and exchange of information** between Member States and the Secretariat.

As stipulated in the ECO Vision, its effective and successful implementation requires a more efficient ECO structure and to meet this end, the ECO Secretariat as well as ECO Specialized Agencies and Regional Institutions will be streamlined and decision-making processes will be strengthened through carrying out necessary institutional reforms. It seems that such **a reform and reinforcement has not been realized in the ECO institution on the environment**; the inadequate capacity of the ECO Institute for Environmental Science and Technology (ECO-IEST) is diminishing rather than augmenting.

Furthermore, the Vision, beyond the monitoring and evaluation mechanism, formulated the **creation of an “ECO Vision Fund” as a financial framework for sustained and regular funding for its implementation**. We may also need to see if such a fund has been established, and if yes, to what extent it has been funded and operational.

3. The way forward

Moving towards the environmental sustainability of the region requires **a robust collective attitude that engages the entire region in environmental action and in demonstrating more social and environmental responsibility**. Such an attitude can be described as a ‘whole-of-organization’ approach at the organizational level and a ‘whole-of-government-and-society’ approach at the national and regional levels.

The ECO Member States must seize any opportunity to **find creative ways to further cooperation** in different areas including the environment, paving the way for more constructive conversations about economic development which is inclusive and participatory, while preserving the environment and shifting policy trajectories towards a more equitable and sustainable economy.

All stakeholders need to work together to make the ECO an eco-friendly organization and region, particularly through integrating the environment, climate change, and sustainable development into all aspects of the ECO regional cooperation, and determined action to reverse the current trends of environmental degradation.

In such a context, it is noteworthy that the Republic of Uzbekistan proposed to convene the 6th Ministerial Meeting on Environment and the First Meeting of the High-Level Dialogue Platform on Environmental Cooperation within the framework of the Samarkand Climate Forum in 2024 to jointly develop the ‘Samarkand Declaration’ to combat sand and dust storms.

Follow-up is needed on the topics considered during the Informal Ministerial Meeting on Environment in Dubai, including the finalization of the draft ECO Cooperation Framework on the Environment (2023-2030) and its annexes, the Regional Initiative on Resource Efficiency, Sustainability, and Circular Economy in the ECO Region (RESCUE), and convening the 6th Ministerial Meeting on Environment and the First Meeting of the High-Level Dialogue Platform on Environmental Cooperation in Samarkand in 2024.

The next UN Climate Change Conference (COP29 of UNFCCC) will be held in Baku (Azerbaijan) on November 11-22, 2024. The organization of such a Global Stock take event in the ECO Member State evidently creates ample opportunities **to employ COP29 platform for bringing together ECO Member States, undertake new joint initiatives and promote the existing ones for enhanced regional cooperation in environmental and climate action**. In such a context, it is highly recommended that the RESCUE (see below ‘Expected Outcome v.’ of “C. Social Welfare and Environment” of “ECO Vision 2025” for details) and ECO-REM (see above ‘Expected Outcome i.’ of “C. Energy” of “ECO Vision 2025” for details) could be overwhelmingly launched in COP29.

Vision Expected Outcome v: *Regional projects in climate/biodiversity areas through partnership with relevant international stakeholders with available regional and global funding will be implemented.*

1. Stocktaking and progress made

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, held 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 this event, the ECO Institute for Environmental Science and Technology (ECO-IEST) prepared a brief document to aid in the LCI's inception. 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 relevant line ministry of the Republic of Türkiye. The issue is at a standstill and needs to be advanced.

The Regional Initiative on Resource Efficiency, Sustainability, and Circular Economy in the ECO Region (RESCUE) should also be highlighted for its potential to boost regional actions in priority areas of collaboration and implementing regional projects. The key overarching objective of this Initiative 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. It envisages a number of expected collaborative activities in a short and mid-term perspective and could be launched as a collaborative initiative in strong cooperation with international partners, which share similar vision, membership and geographical coverage with ECO.

The RESCUE initiative could be instrumental in building regional resilience and sustainability in a long-term perspective, and thus position ECO Region as a proponent of just and innovative transition in the international arena. The Member States welcomed this initiative as a promising regional cooperation platform, which will consequently enable launching and implementation of practical activities envisaged in its Concept Paper.

2. Bottlenecks/impediments

There are several impediments that can hinder the definition and implementation of regional projects on the environment. Some of the common obstacles include:

- I. **Lack of coordination and cooperation among regional stakeholders:** Regional projects often involve multiple stakeholders from diverse agencies of Member States, which can lead to challenges in coordinating efforts and reaching consensus on project goals and priorities.
- II. **Political and economic factors:** Regional environmental projects may be subject to political tensions, conflicting interests, and budget constraints, which can make it difficult to secure funding and support for environmental initiatives.
- III. **Legal and regulatory barriers:** Differences in legal frameworks and regulatory requirements across the ECO Region can complicate the development and implementation of regional environmental projects, leading to delays and uncertainty.
- IV. **Limited technical capacity and expertise:** The ECO Region lack the sufficient technical capacity and expertise needed to effectively plan and execute environmental projects, which can impede progress and result in suboptimal outcomes.
- V. **Lack of public awareness and engagement:** Public support is crucial for the success of environmental projects, but lack of awareness and engagement from local communities can undermine efforts to address environmental challenges at a regional level.
- VI. **Environmental degradation and resource depletion:** In some cases, the severity of environmental challenges in the region may be so advanced that it becomes difficult to implement effective solutions, especially if resources are already depleted or irreversibly damaged.

3. The way forward

The ECO Member States need to address the above-mentioned impediments. This requires a multi-faceted approach that involves fostering political will, promoting public participation, building strong partnerships, enhancing technical capacity, and overcoming legal and regulatory barriers. Collaboration between and among all stakeholders, including governments, non-governmental organizations, businesses, and communities is particularly essential in environment to overcome these challenges and drive progress towards sustainable regional environmental initiatives.

Vision Expected Outcome vi: *ECO will be recognized as a regional group/partner in the global environment community.*

1. Stocktaking and progress made

In its capacity as Observer, the ECO Secretariat has maintained its communications and consultations expanding its outreach with the relevant UN agencies and conventions, namely United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP),

Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), Convention on Biological Diversity (UNCBD), Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD), and Forum on Forests (UNFF) in particular for better preparation and implementation of the aforementioned ECO Cooperation Framework on the Environment (2023-2030) and its annexes (relevant Work Plans) and provision of support for and capacity-building activities within the ECO Region. In such a context, it is worth mentioning that apart from different communications and virtual meetings, the ECO Secretary-General attended and delivered statements at the United Nations Climate Change Conference (COP 27) in Sharm el-Sheikh in November 2022, and COP 28 in Dubai in December 2023. The ECO Deputy Secretary-General also participated and delivered statements in the 15th session of the Conference of the Parties of the UNCCD) in Abidjan in May 2022, the 21st session of the UNCCD Committee for the Review of the Implementation of the Convention (CRIC-21) in Samarkand in November 2023, and the sixth session of the United Nations Environment Assembly (UNEA-6) in Nairobi in February 2024.

2. Bottlenecks/impediments

Apart from political impediments rooted in the politicization of environmental processes, it should be taken into consideration that the recognition as a regional group/partner in the global environment community needs the following requirements which cannot be met in the absence of a robust political will for environmental cooperation among the ECO Member States:

- I. Clear identification of priority areas for collaboration and technical needs:** International partners will further recognize organizations that have identified their priority areas for collaboration and technical needs, and can articulate them clearly. This may include identifying gaps in knowledge, skills, or technology.
- II. Demonstrated commitment to learning:** International partners will want to work with organizations that are committed to learning and improving their technical capacity. This may include investing in training and professional development for staff, and engaging in peer-to-peer learning opportunities.
- III. Strong institutional capacity:** It is more likely that international partners recognize organizations that have strong institutional capacity and can effectively manage technical support. This may include having experienced staff, effective governance structures, and established systems for managing technical assistance.
- IV. Collaboration and partnerships:** International partners will further recognize organizations that are willing to collaborate and form partnerships with other stakeholders, including governments, civil society organizations, and local communities.

- V. **Transparency and accountability:** International partners will be more willing to work with organizations that are transparent and accountable in their operations and use of funding. This may include regular reporting on progress and outcomes, and compliance with international standards.

3. **The way forward**

The ECO Member States and Secretariat must work together to address the above-mentioned impediments. This requires a multi-faceted approach that involves fostering political will, promoting public participation, building strong partnerships, enhancing technical capacity, and overcoming legal and regulatory barriers.

GENERAL REMARKS:

- The ECO Secretariat was mentioned at the top in nearly all activities and actions to achieve the outcomes in the column devoted to the responsible entity in the Implementation Framework. It doesn't appear realistic, since the Secretariat's function is to provide the Member States with secretariat services. No secretariat has the potential to create national dynamics for necessary changes and generate political will among Member States which is key for regional collaboration. The Secretariat can organize and facilitate processes and meetings agreed upon by the Member States, while the success and even mere convening of these events rely upon the Member States' will for active participation.
- It should also to be emphasized that the combination of energy and environment in one chapter could be more pertinent driven by the strong indispensable energy-environment nexus and ongoing global transition trends. The reflection of environment within social welfare chapter led to a sort of fragmentation and deviations. This is the key conceptual impediment that ECO may address while elaborating its next long-term strategic document or revising the existing one.

G: Judicial and Parliamentary Coordination and ECO Advocacy Program for Afghanistan

ECO Vision 2025 envisaged that, the “Regional law enforcement and police organizations/mechanisms will be in place to coordinate and support national and international efforts to combat illegal drugs and human trafficking and other trans-regional organized crime”.

In this regard, Establishment of ECOPOL, establishment of the Regional Center for Cooperation of Anti- Corruption Agencies and Ombudsmen (RCCACO) as well as establishment an effective mechanism for judicial cooperation/legal assistance in the ECO region, organizing capacity building programs are among the JPC&EAPA’s areas of priorities for implementation of ECO Vision.

A) Establishment of ECOPOL

ECOPOL is envisaged to be the police of ECO Region entrusted with multifarious responsibilities such as exchange of information, investigation and analysis, awareness raising, developing of assistance programmes, etc. It is expected to assist the law enforcement authorities of the ECO Member States in their fight against serious forms of organized crimes.

Progress:

The ECOPOL’s Draft Statute was prepared and discussed during two Experts Group Meetings as well as 1st ECO Chiefs of Police Meeting. The 2nd Expert Group Meeting, however, agreed ad referendum for finalization of the Draft Statute of ECOPOL.

Bottlenecks/impediments

- 1) Disagreement among the ECO Member States (Iran, Pakistan and Türkiye) over the required number of parties for entering the Draft Statute of ECOPOL into force.
- 2) Number of the volunteer Member States (Iran, Pakistan and Türkiye) for hosting the Secretariat of ECOPOL.

The Way Forward

The establishment of ECOPOL depends on finalization of its draft statute by 2nd ECO Chiefs of Police. Iran has offered to host the meeting in 2024.

B) Establishment of ECO Regional Center for Cooperation of Anti-corruption Agencies and Ombudsmen (RCCACO):

Fighting against financial crimes like corruption and money laundering has remained a major concern of the Member States. Relevantly, the heads of anti-corruption agencies of ECO Member States decided to establish a regional forum under the name of “ECO Regional Center for Cooperation of Anti-Corruption Agencies and Ombudsmen (RCCACO)”.

Progress

The Islamic Republic of Iran (2016), the Islamic Republic of Pakistan (2017), Republic of Azerbaijan (2019) and the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan (2020) have ratified the statute of the RCCACO while the Republic of Tajikistan has signed it. Resultantly, the statute has entered into force in 2020. As agreed, the Secretariat of the Center will be stationed in Tehran.

First meeting of the General Assembly of the States Parties to the Regional Center was hosted by National Accountability Bureau of Pakistan on 21 September 2023. During the meeting, the Islamic Republic of Iran has once again offered to prepare the necessary documents for operationalization of RCCACO by the end of June 2024.

The Way Forward

Operationalization of RCCACO depends on timely preparation of the necessary documents by Iran to be approved during the 2nd General Assembly meeting.

C) Establishment of an Effective Mechanism for Judicial Cooperation /Legal Assistance

The 4th Meeting of the Attorneys/Prosecutors General of the ECO Member States was hosted by the Republic of Azerbaijan on 14-16 September 2023 in Baku. The meeting tasked the Secretariat in collaboration with the Attorneys/Prosecutors General Office of the interested Member States to develop a mechanism for enhancing regional judicial cooperation. The Plan of Interaction among the Attorneys/Prosecutors General Offices of the ECO Member States has been prepared according to the proposals made by honorable Attorneys/Prosecutors General of the ECO Member States during their statements, reports and the declarations of the previous four meetings of Attorneys/Prosecutors General of the ECO Member States.

The Plan of Interaction will be considered by the representatives of the ECO Member States for its approval during the upcoming 5th Meeting of Attorneys/Prosecutors General of the ECO Member States scheduled to be held in Dushanbe on 16 May 2024.

D) Organizing capacity building programs

The ECO Secretariat in cooperation with the ECO Member States have organized various capacity building programs for the officials of the ECO Member States especially in the field of drug trafficking, prevention of drugs addiction, etc. For the year 2024, Iran and Pakistan have expressed their readiness to organize some capacity building programs in the fields of corruption and drug related issues.

E) Afghanistan and ECO Vision 2025

The ECO Vision 2025 acknowledges the strong interdependence between peace and development and reiterates the belief that peace and stability are essential for realizing the genuine goals of sustained economic growth, development and welfare of our countries and peoples. Under the Vision, it is recommitted to continue supporting the national, regional and global efforts to help achieve lasting peace and prosperity in the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan.

Progress

Unfortunately, due to the current developments in Afghanistan, all the issues related to implementation of EAPA are on hold.

SECTOR-WISE PRIORITIES

While compiling the document, the following sector-wise priorities have been taken into account:

- **Trade & Investment**
 - Operationalization of ECO Trade Agreement (ECOTA)
 - Expanding ECOTA's scope from preferential trade to Free Trade Agreement
 - ECO Trade Facilitation Strategy/ Trade Facilitation Agreement
 - ECO Protocol on Joint Promotional Activities
 - Operationalization of Reinsurance Company (ERC)

- **Transport & Communication**
 - Development & enhancement of infrastructure and operational capacity of the border crossing points for facilitation of transit transport.
 - Digitalization of railway transit transport (Electronic Information Exchange between railways and customs)

- **Energy, Minerals & Environment**
 - ECO Regional Electricity Market (ECO-REM)
 - ECO Clean Energy Centre (CECECO) Regional Initiative on Resource Efficiency, Sustainability, and Circular Economy in the ECO Region (RESCUE)

- **Agriculture & Industry**
 - Increasing cooperation on the activities of ECO Regional Institute for Standardization, Conformity Assessment, Accreditation and Metrology (ECO-RISCAM)
 - Cooperation on Higher Food Security and Safety in the Region
 - Animal Trade and Veterinary Services

- **Human Resources & Sustainable Development**
 - Preparing SDG Performance Index for the ECO Region
 - 6th ECO Ministerial Meeting on Health

- **Tourism**
 - Establishment of the ECO Advisory Committee on Tourism
 - Holding the 3rd ECO Conference and Exhibition on Health Tourism
 - Network of the ECO Tourism Capitals

TRADE & INVESTMENT

Project No.1

Operationalization of ECO Trade Agreement (ECOTA)

Holding 9th ECOTA Cooperation Council Meeting (ECOTA CCM) aimed at consensus-building and proposing the leadership with a 'Road Map'. The expected outcomes to be revised are:

- a) Operationalization of ECOTA TRM (Article 4) on preferential trade.
- b) Implementation of ECOTA Articles (other than Article 4) on trade facilitation.
- c) Expansion of ECOTA membership

Project Status

- The implementation of the tariff reduction agreed upon under the Economic Cooperation Organization Trade Agreement (ECOTA) has faced challenges due to concerns about the imbalances created by the Tariff Reduction Modality (TRM) outlined in Article 4. Parties have expressed that the current TRM disproportionately affects their obligations versus benefits, leading some to advocate for amendments to achieve a more balanced approach. The 9th ECOTA Coordination Council Meeting (CCM) has not been held since 2019.
- To address this deadlock, the Secretariat organized a 'Virtual Technical Session on ECOTA' on May 7, 2024, during which the parties agreed to convene for the 9th ECOTA CCM in July 2024 in Pakistan. In preparation for this meeting, the Secretariat conducted a research study proposing various scenarios for amending the TRM and drafted wording for these amendments to be finalized by Pakistan for consideration during the 9th ECOTA CCM.
- Additionally, there is a strong focus on implementing other ECOTA Articles, particularly those related to non-tariff issues such as standardization, product certification, and intellectual property rights, to promote intra-regional trade. The Secretariat's efforts also include enhancing trade facilitation through the adoption of a trade facilitation strategy/agreement, customs cooperation, Electronic Data Interchange (EDI) and trade promotion initiatives.

Impediment (if any)

- Despite efforts since 2008, establishing a Preferential Trade Regime has seen limited success. Effective tariff reduction necessitates both technical decision-making and the political will to implement such a regime.
- The main impediments include pending actions from ECOTA Parties and a lack of interest, which results in insufficient quorum for meetings necessary to

make important decisions. Additionally, there is a lack of follow-up on decisions and inadequate responses from parties. Furthermore, insufficient funding for regular activities and minimal capacity-building projects contribute to the challenges faced.

Possible Way Forward

- The 9th ECOTA Coordination Council Meeting (CCM) scheduled for July 2024 in Pakistan will determine whether parties can agree to immediately implement tariff reductions under ECOTA. Should immediate implementation not occur, Member States, including ECOTA Parties, may initiate discussions to expand ECOTA's scope into a Free Trade Agreement (FTA) or devise a new Tariff Reduction Modality for a new agreement.
- All ECO Member States may commence negotiations accordingly.
- Annually allocate a specified budget, determined based on actual needs, for capacity building, training, and awareness projects aimed at supporting ECOTA implementation. These initiatives will focus on addressing Non-Tariff Barriers (NTBs), Intellectual Property Rights (IPRs), and enhancing e-commerce for global competitiveness.
- Establish a dedicated Trade Policy Review Mechanism (TPRM) for ECOTA to convene every four years.

Project No.2

Expanding ECOTA's scope from preferential trade to Free Trade Agreement

Current Status

- The ECO Vision 2025 initially proposed implementing ECOTA. Plans to extend ECOTA's coverage to a Free Trade Agreement (FTA) were included in the vision document. The Secretariat drafted Terms of Reference (ToR) for a study on the prospects of an ECO FTA and proposed drafting an FTA text. However, the Republic of Turkey suggested that operationalizing ECOTA should be prioritized as the first step, with the possibility of expanding ECOTA's scope considered afterward.

Impediment (if any)

- The failure of ECOTA Parties to operationalize ECOTA has led to significant delays in establishing a regional preferential trading system. This delay hinders efforts to double intra-regional trade volume and enhance the ECO region's share in global trade by leveraging the export potential of the region.
- There is a lack of consensus on whether to initiate negotiations for a Free Trade Area.

Possible Way Forward

- The 9th ECOTA Coordination Council Meeting (CCM) in July 2024 in Pakistan will determine if parties can agree to immediately implement tariff reductions under ECOTA. If ECOTA is not implemented immediately, Member States (including ECOTA Parties) may initiate discussions to expand ECOTA's scope into an FTA or devise a new Tariff Reduction Modality for a new agreement, preferably an FTA.
- Negotiations may be initiated among all ECO Member States.
- Allocate a specified annual budget, based on actual needs, for capacity building, training, and awareness projects to support ECOTA implementation, focusing on NTBs, IPRs, and enhancing e-commerce for global competitiveness.
- Establish a dedicated Trade Policy Review Mechanism (TPRM) for ECOTA every four years.
- FTA negotiations should proceed independently of full ECOTA implementation to prevent further delays.
- Focus on pursuing the study recommended by the Secretariat, drafting the FTA text, and circulating it among all ECO Member States for signing and ratification. Addressing NTBs, as proposed by the Secretariat in the Non-Paper to be discussed in the 9th ECOTA CCM, could serve as the initial step toward expanding intra-regional trade.
- Allocate funds for research related to the FTA, including chapters on trade in services and investment.

Project No.3

ECO Trade Facilitation Strategy/ Trade Facilitation Agreement Finalization of TFS and Signing TFA

Project Status

- The 1st Joint Working Group (JWG) Meeting to negotiate the "Draft Trade Facilitation Strategy (TFS)" and a "Trade Facilitation Agreement (TFA)" was held on June 22, 2023, in Ankara. The meeting focused on deliberating the Draft Trade Facilitation Strategy, with brief discussions on the Trade Facilitation Agreement. During the 34th RPC, the Republic of Uzbekistan volunteered to host the 2nd JWG Meeting in the second quarter of 2024, initially planned as an in-person event. However, Uzbekistan later reversed their decision to host the event. Finalization of the "Draft Trade Facilitation Strategy" and the "Trade Facilitation Agreement" will align with ECOTA.

Collaborations for capacity building will also be explored to integrate trade facilitation measures.

Impediment (if any)

- The 1st Joint Working Group (JWG) Meeting on Trade Facilitation Strategy and Trade Facilitation Agreement, mandated by the 4th ECO Ministerial Meeting on Commerce & Foreign Trade (Kabul, 2011), experienced considerable delays.
- Major bottlenecks in this area include a lack of interest among member states, which has made it challenging to find a host and has resulted in quorum issues.

Possible Way Forward

- Member States should recognize their responsibility in this regard and actively offer to host crucial meetings in 2024 to finalize the draft Trade Facilitation Strategy (TFS) and Trade Facilitation Agreement (TFA), facilitating their timely implementation.

Project No.4

ECO Protocol on Joint Promotional Activities

Signing and Ratification of the ECO Protocol on Organizing Joint Trade Promotion Activities

Project Status

- Member States are encouraged to expedite administrative formalities and promptly update the Secretariat on their progress, acknowledging the Agreement's critical role in enhancing intra-regional trade.

Impediment (if any)

- Since 2017, Member States have not completed the necessary administrative formalities to sign/ratify the adopted ECO Protocol on Organizing Joint Promotional Activities. Consequently, they have not shared it with the Secretariat for approval by the Council of Ministers (COM) and subsequent announcement for signatures.

Possible Way Forward

- Member States are encouraged to promptly finalize their updates on administrative formalities and share them with the Secretariat. This will ensure inclusion of the matter in the agenda of the upcoming COM Meeting, where approval will be sought and Member States will be invited to formally sign the document.

Project No.5

Operationalization of Reinsurance Company (ERC)

Project Status

- The I.R. Pakistan is actively pursuing the transfer of paid-in capital contributions through the State Bank of Pakistan to the Central Bank of I.R. Iran. In Karachi, Pakistan, ERC authorities at PRCL are finalizing the host country agreement and relevant regulations, including financial rules and recruitment policies. These items will be tabled for discussion during the inaugural meetings of the General Assembly (G.A.) and Board of Directors (BOD) to operationalize the ERC.
- Following a consultative meeting where three parties to the ERC made requests, the Secretariat has allocated funds for hosting the 1st General Assembly and 1st BOD meetings consecutively, as scheduled by ERC authorities in Pakistan and approved by the Council of Permanent Representatives (CPR).

Impediment (if any)

- The primary obstacle lies in the transfer of paid-in capital contributions to the ERC from the I.R. Iran. While the I.R. Iran and the Republic of Türkiye have expressed readiness to transfer their contributions, finalization of consultations between the State Bank of Pakistan and the Central Bank of Iran is required to determine the transfer process.

Possible Way Forward

- The Islamic Republic of Pakistan is poised to complete pending actions and share relevant documents and regulations for input from all parties before finalization, as agreed upon in the virtual consultation meeting of 2024. Furthermore, consultations will be concluded through meetings between the State Bank of Pakistan and the Central Bank of Iran.
- Upon operationalization, ECO Member States will be formally invited to join the ERC by 2025.

TRANSPORT & COMMUNICATIONS

Project No.1

Development & enhancement of infrastructure and operational capacity of the border crossing points for facilitation of transit transport

Project Status

- The current border crossing points (BCPs) are set to undergo expansion to meet the growing demands of regional transit. This expansion may involve increasing the infrastructure capacity at existing BCPs, relocating customs formalities to inland customs offices, or implementing both solutions. Priority will be given to the most congested BCPs for these improvements,

Impediment (if any)

- Lack of alignment of national policies with project objectives is hindering progress.
- Insufficient funding is a major barrier to project implementation.
- Lack of consensus and coordination among stakeholders is delaying decision-making and progress.

Possible Way Forward

- Establish a robust coordination mechanism, such as working groups involving stakeholders and neighboring countries, to enhance planning and enable swift action.
- Conduct capacity-building workshops and facilitate the exchange of experiences to strengthen expertise across relevant areas.
- Identify one or two border crossing points (BCPs) for expansion and development to alleviate congestion and improve efficiency.
- Allocate funds for conducting studies and enhancing capacity building efforts to support project implementation and sustainability.

Project No.2

Digitalization of railway transit transport (Electronic Information Exchange between railways and customs)

Current Status

- The project focuses on digitalizing transit transport, including the digital exchange of information and transit transport documents. Implementation of electronic information exchange among railways is underway, with Iran and Turkey having already implemented this system. Central Asian Member States are also progressing with similar mechanisms for data exchange. The Secretariat has developed two concept projects on digitalization, which have been circulated among Member States for feedback and are awaiting responses.

Impediment (if any)

- Insufficient financial backing poses a significant obstacle to project advancement.
- Limited awareness and inadequate capacity hinder effective project implementation.
- Challenges in coordinating and harmonizing technical aspects create barriers to project synergy.
- Inadequate involvement of necessary technical experts and specialists impedes project progress.
- Integrating separate systems to ensure interoperability presents a complex technical challenge.

Possible Way Forward

- Capacity building and coordination.
- Establishing Coordination Mechanism
- Development\harmonization of interoperable software infrastructure by the MS through the Secretariat
- Allocation of fund for capacity building and studies

ENERGY, MINERAL & ENVIRONMENT (EME)

Project No.1

ECO Regional Electricity Market (ECO-REM)

Project Status

- The establishment of ECO-REM is crucial for achieving long-term energy connectivity and sustainability in the ECO Region.
- Despite being initiated a decade ago, progress has been stagnant with no tangible developments. The ECO Secretariat has been actively working to lay the groundwork for launching the Feasibility Study of ECO-REM.
- In January 2024, UNESCAP launched the "Energy Connectivity for Sustainable Development" project, covering all 10 ECO Member States to support ECO-REM. Joint activities and consultations are currently underway as part of its implementation.
- The UNESCAP project aims to deliver a roadmap with actionable recommendations for policy and regulatory reforms to enable multilateral, multi-directional power trading at sub-regional levels.

Impediment (if any)

- ECO-REM requires enhanced ownership and active involvement from all stakeholders. The insufficient engagement of Member States and financial constraints are major impediments to realizing this crucial project.
- The development of ECO-REM faces numerous challenges that must be addressed to fully achieve its objectives:
 - Diverse regulatory frameworks
 - Infrastructure development
 - Institutional arrangements
 - Market design
 - Technical challenges
 - Data sharing
 - Tariffs
 - Capacity building for regional power trading

Possible Way Forward

- Regular dialogue and proactive involvement among Member States are crucial for shaping the regional electricity market in alignment with national and regional interests.
- A peer review workshop is scheduled for June 11-12, 2024, in Astana, Kazakhstan, to discuss the policy brief and key findings of the roadmap.
- The project deliverable is expected to be presented by the end of 2024.
- The 5th ECO Energy Ministerial Meeting and the 2nd Experts Group Meeting on the establishment of ECO-REM are planned in the ECO Calendar of Events for 2024, both of which could mark significant milestones in advancing the project.

Project No.2

ECO Clean Energy Centre (CECECO)

Project Status

- In recent years, ECO has mainstreamed the sustainable energy transition in its overall energy agenda. The CECECO Project, jointly implemented with UNIDO, aims to facilitate this process.
- The CECECO Project will be implemented in three phases: preparatory, first operational, and second operational. The preparatory phase is nearing completion, and efforts are underway to operationalize the Centre as soon as possible.
- Active engagement of Member States in all project phases, particularly in signing and ratifying the Charter, is crucial.
- In 2024, two Ad-Hoc Committee meetings monitored CECECO's progress and discussed five project proposals submitted by UNIDO. These proposals, based on success stories from around the world, are being considered for potential replication in the ECO Region and subsequent implementation by the Centre.

Impediment (if any)

- Two key pending components need to be addressed in parallel to finalize the preparatory phase: regulatory and fund-raising. For the formal operationalization of CECECO, three Member States must sign and ratify its Charter. So far, it has been signed by Azerbaijan and Türkiye.
- UNIDO has verbally confirmed its intention to pledge funds once the Centre is operationalized. The funding decision will be made in parallel with the

ongoing legislative process regarding the entry into force of the CECECO Charter.

- Member States, excluding Turkey, Azerbaijan, and I.R. Iran, are encouraged to provide feedback on five project proposals that could potentially be replicated in the ECO Region and subsequently implemented by the Centre. Feedback is awaited since February 2024.

Possible Way Forward

- The expectation for 2024 is to achieve new momentum in the seamless development of the Project. The Charter of CECECO is open for signing and ratification by Member States. Following completion of the relevant regulatory procedures, the inauguration of CECECO is planned during the next UN Climate Change Conference (COP29) in Baku in November 2024.
- In a worst-case scenario, the Centre could be inaugurated by the expiration of "ECO Vision 2025" by 2026, as outlined in its expected outcomes.
- It is strongly recommended to raise additional funds for the operationalization of the Centre.
- The selection of priority projects for replication in the ECO Region will enable the launch of programmatic activities of CECECO upon inauguration, benefiting the entire ECO Region.

Project No.3

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

Project Status

- RESCUE was jointly initiated by the ECO Secretariat and the ECO Chairmanship of Azerbaijan in 2023 to establish a regional cooperation platform advocating for a just transition to a resource-efficient, circular, and regenerative economy.
- The Concept Paper for RESCUE was circulated among Member States on October 8, 2023. It outlines several short and mid-term activities and proposes launching as a collaborative initiative with international partners.
- Member States endorsed this initiative during the 7th ECO Working Group Meeting on Environment (November 20, 2023) and the ECO Informal Ministerial Meeting on Environment in Dubai on the sidelines of COP28 (December 9, 2023), viewing it as a promising regional cooperation platform. The "ECO Work Programme for 2024" also embraces the RESCUE Initiative

and encourages Member States to participate in the proposed activities outlined in its Concept Paper.

Impediment (if any)

- ECO faces significant challenges with the engagement of Member States in environmental cooperation, struggling to achieve quorum for environment-related events, including ministerial meetings.
- The organization continues to contend with slow communication and inadequate exchange of information between Member States and the Secretariat.
- The ECO Region lacks sufficient technical capacity and expertise necessary for effective planning and execution of environmental projects, posing obstacles that may lead to suboptimal outcomes.

Possible Way Forward

- ECO needs strong political will and collective commitment to drive regional environmental action effectively.
- RESCUE could elevate the ECO Region as a champion of a just transition. Launching it at COP29 in Baku (November 11-22, 2024) would leverage this global platform to foster new initiatives and promote existing ones, advancing regional environmental and climate efforts significantly.

AGRICULTURE & INDUSTRY

Project No.1

Increasing cooperation on the activities of ECO Regional Institute for Standardization, Conformity Assessment, Accreditation and Metrology (ECO-RISCAM)

Establishment of Technical Management Boards (TMBs) of Standardization and Accreditation in *Türkiye & Pakistan* and Holding the First General Council Meeting of ECO-RISCAM and finalization and approval of basic documents of ECO-RISCAM during this meeting.

Project Status

- The establishment of ECO-RISCAM was approved at the 3rd ECO Ministerial Meeting on Industry in Lahore, Pakistan, in 2008.
- The Statute of ECO-RISCAM was endorsed by the 18th Council of Ministers (COM).
- Technical Management Boards (TMBs) for Standardization and Accreditation are located in Türkiye, Metrology in Pakistan, and Conformity Assessment in Iran.
- Afghanistan, Iran, Pakistan, and Türkiye have signed and ratified the Statute of ECO-RISCAM, making it enforceable.
- The Central Secretariat and Conformity Assessment TMB of ECO-RISCAM were inaugurated on December 14, 2016, in Tehran, Iran.
- Iran proposed to host the First General Council Meeting of ECO-RISCAM in August 2023, but it was postponed due to lack of confirmation from Pakistan.
- Nine High-Level Working Group Meetings of ECO-RISCAM have been conducted, with the 9th meeting held virtually by Iran on November 21, 2023.
- Member States were requested to submit feedback on draft documents by February 20, 2024, for approval during the First General Council Meeting; however, only Azerbaijan and Iran provided comments.

Impediments (if any)

- The limited participation of Member States, especially those who have signed the Statute, poses a challenge to the successful convening of the 1st General Council Meeting of ECO-RISCAM.

- Progress in establishing the Technical Management Boards (TMBs) by Pakistan and Türkiye needs a boost to keep the project on track.

Possible Way Forward

- Member States (except Afghanistan, Iran, Pakistan, and Türkiye) are urged to sign and ratify the Statute of ECO-RISCAM to facilitate the Institute's early operation.
- Türkiye and Pakistan are encouraged to expedite the establishment of the Technical Management Boards for Standardization and Accreditation (Türkiye) and Metrology (Pakistan) of ECO-RISCAM.
- Iran is requested to provide a new date for the First General Council Meeting of ECO-RISCAM. All Member States are encouraged to actively participate and submit their comments on the draft documents (except Azerbaijan and Iran) for finalization and approval at the meeting.

Project No.2

Cooperation on Higher Food Security and Safety in the Region

Implementation of the ECO Regional Program for Food Security (ECO-RPFS)

Project Status

- ECO Vision aims to enhance food security and safety in the region.
- The ECO Secretariat, ECO Regional Coordination Center for Food Security (ECO-RCCFS), and FAO updated the ECO Regional Program for Food Security (ECO-RPFS) to reflect the post-pandemic situation.
- Adoption of Updated ECO-RPFS: The updated ECO-RPFS was adopted at the 7th ECO Ministerial Meeting on Agriculture and the 6th HLEM on July 5-6, 2022, in Tashkent, Uzbekistan.
- Implementation Efforts: Efforts are underway to implement the ECO-RPFS to improve resilience to future shocks and ensure food security.
- Steering Committee Meetings: Four Steering Committee Meetings of ECO-RCCFS have been conducted to oversee the implementation of ECO-RPFS.
- 4th Steering Committee Meeting: Held on October 6, 2022, in Istanbul, Türkiye, focusing on effective implementation strategies.
- The project "Transformation of the ECO Regional Coordination Centre for Food Security (ECO-RCCFS) from a programme-based organization into a self-sustainable institution" concluded in 2023. It aimed to enhance ECO-RCCFS's

capacity to support Member States in improving food security and nutrition policies.

Impediment (if any)

- Lack of financial support from the ECO Trade and Development Bank, donors, international and regional organizations hampers the implementation of agriculture, food security, and RPFS projects.

Possible Way Forward

- Iran's indication of readiness to host the 8th ECO Ministerial Meeting on Agriculture and 7th High-Level Experts Meeting in 2024 will enhance regional cooperation on food security challenges and resilience planning, pending confirmation of dates and details from the host country.
- Türkiye will host the 5th Steering Committee Meeting of ECO-RCCFS to implement the ECO Regional Program for Food Security (ECO-RPFS), urging all Member States to actively engage in ECO-RCCFS activities.
- ECO-RCCFS, in collaboration with the Secretariat, will develop concrete project proposals for ECO-RPFS implementation, promoting coordination and synergy in regional efforts to enhance food security through technical cooperation, technology transfer and agricultural productivity. The Secretariat may seek financial support from the ECO Trade and Development Bank for these agriculture, food security and RPFS projects.

Project No.3

Animal Trade and Veterinary Services

Implementation of the Work Plan of the priority activities of the ECO Veterinary Commission (ECO-VECO) for 2023-2028

Project Status

- The 19th Council of Ministers (COM) approved the establishment of ECO Veterinary Commission (ECO-VECO) in Tehran as a Specialized Agency of ECO.
- The Council also endorsed the Statute of ECO-VECO and initiated its signing and ratification process by Member States.
- To date, only Iran and Afghanistan have signed and ratified the Statute.
- The 3rd ECO Heads of Veterinary Organizations Meeting in Tehran on October 6-8, 2018, finalized the Work Plan for ECO-VECO's priority activities.

- Azerbaijan hosted the First Technical Committee Meeting virtually on November 15, 2022, to implement the Work Plan.
- Iran conducted the 2nd Technical Committee Meeting on December 13, 2023, further advancing the implementation of priority activities for ECO-VECO.

Impediment (if any)

- Active participation of Member States is crucial to enhance cooperation on veterinary issues and animal trade in the region.

Possible Way Forward

- The Islamic Republic of Iran will host the 4th Meeting of the ECO Heads of Veterinary Organizations in 2024, pending confirmation of the date and details from the host authorities.
- Member States are urged to consider signing and ratifying the Statute of ECO-VECO to facilitate its early operation.
- The 3rd Technical Committee for implementing the Work Plan of ECO-VECO's priority activities will convene virtually in 2024, preceding the 4th Meeting of the ECO Heads of Veterinary Organizations.
- Member States (excluding Azerbaijan, Pakistan, Tajikistan, Türkiye, and Uzbekistan) are requested to nominate representatives for two Ad-hoc Working Groups: one for establishing a network of standard reference laboratories and another for establishing a network of standard slaughterhouses. ECO-VECO is also urged to expedite the establishment of these Ad-hoc Working Groups to initiate discussions on forming the mentioned networks.

HUMAN RESOURCES & SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

Project No.1

Preparing SDG Performance Index for the ECO Region

Project Status

- During the 31st RPC Meeting in 2021, the Secretariat was required to gather data and documents from Member Countries regarding their progress in implementing the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), aiming to compile a regional SDGs report and performance index.
- In the 34th RPC Meeting, the Secretariat was assigned the deadline of completing the project by the end of 2024.
- The Secretariat prepared a project document with a budget of under \$10,000 to finalize the project.

Impediment (if any)

- Since 2021, the Secretariat has repeatedly requested Member States to submit their respective data and documents on SDG implementation status. Despite these requests, the compilation of a consolidated regional SDGs report and the preparation of an SDG performance index for the Region are still pending.

Possible Way Forward

- The Secretariat announced the establishment of the "High-Level Sustainable Development Working Group (HLSDWG)" in May 2024, pivotal for drafting an action plan to enhance policy coherence for sustainable development (PCSD) in the Region. This initiative aims to improve coordination between the Secretariat and Member States' institutions to gather necessary data/documents for preparing the SDG Performance Index.
- Turkmenistan has informed the Secretariat of its intention to host the "1st ECO Forum on Sustainable Development" in 2024. This Forum, alongside the efforts of the HLSDWG, is expected to facilitate the preparation of an action plan for sustainable development in the ECO Region and advance the project on "Preparing the SDG Performance Index for the ECO Region."

Project No.2

6th ECO Ministerial Meeting on Health

Current Status

- Iran has declared its readiness to host the Ministerial Meeting in 2024.
- An MoU between ECO and WHO is scheduled to be signed during the event.

Impediment (if any)

- ECO's "Action Plan on Health," approved in 2021 and revised in 2023, faces challenges in effective implementation due to limited Member States' participation in health cooperation, particularly concerning non-communicable diseases and universal health coverage.
- Establishing a regional consultation mechanism for enhanced technical cooperation on communicable diseases, in collaboration with WHO and other relevant international organizations, is crucial for the ECO Region. Currently, ECO lacks signed MoUs with WHO's relevant regional offices in this regard.

Possible Way Forward

- The 5th Expert Group Meeting and High-Level Working Group Meeting on Health, followed by the 6th Ministerial Meeting on Health, are expected to enhance collaboration among Member States for better implementation of the Action Plan on Health.
- Bilateral meetings with WHO country representatives for Iran and the WHO Eastern Mediterranean Regional Office aim to prepare an MoU between ECO and WHO, enhancing mutual collaboration and support for regional health project proposals. The MoU is anticipated to be signed during the 6th Ministerial Meeting on Health in Iran in 2024.

TOURISM

Project No.1

Establishment of the ECO Advisory Committee on Tourism

Project Status

- On November 9, 2023 at the 16th ECO Summit in Tashkent, H.E. President Shavkat Mirziyoyev proposed establishing an Advisory Committee on Tourism and holding its first meeting in Shakhrisabz, the ECO Tourism Capital for 2024.
- The proposal received support during the 34th Meeting of the ECO Regional Planning Council held in January 2024.
- Uzbekistan side circulated a Concept Note on the Advisory Committee on Tourism to ECO Member States for review in February 2024.
- The issue was discussed at the 285th Meeting of the ECO Council of Permanent Representatives (CPR) in Yazd, Iran on March 6, 2024. Iran and Pakistan provided comments on the draft Concept Note.
- On March 28, 2024, a revised version of the Concept Note was disseminated to Member States.
- A meeting in Shakhrisabz on April 26, 2024, celebrating its designation as the ECO Tourism Capital, discussed the Committee's establishment. Key aspects such as objectives, structure, procedures, duties and meeting protocols were covered. The matter was referred to the CPR for further consideration
- The Secretariat is awaiting further proposals and comments from ECO Member States on the provided draft Concept Note.

Impediment (if any)

- Delay in Sharing Essential Documents and Information by the Member States.

Possible Way Forward

- The Secretariat will propose an expert Group meeting to finalize the Concept before presenting it to the CPR.
- With CPR consent, the issue will undergo a two-week silence procedure for COM approval.

- Once approved by the COM, the Secretariat will request Member States to nominate representatives for the Committee.

Project No.2

Holding the 3rd ECO Conference and Exhibition on Health Tourism

Current Status

- The ECO region offers diverse tourism segments, including cultural, nature, health and wellness, MICE and gastronomy.
- Diversifying tourism products and services is crucial to reduce reliance on a single market or activity.
- Health tourism, a significant industry for foreign exchange, faces challenges due to poor coordination between health centers and tourism sectors, hindering its economic and social impact.
- Hosting the next ECO Conference and Exhibition on Health Tourism can raise public awareness of its benefits.
- Iran has volunteered to host the 3rd ECO Conference and Exhibition on Health Tourism in Hamedan in June 2024, as announced at the 34th RPC Meeting.

Impediment (if any)

- Insufficient participation from Member States
- Financial constraints

Possible Way Forward

- The Secretariat will communicate the program and hospitality details of the event to Member States.
- The Conference will facilitate partnerships among health tourism stakeholders from Member States, identify challenges in developing health tourism in the region, and propose possible solutions.

Project No.3

Network of the ECO Tourism Capitals

Project Status

- The "ECO Tourism Capitals" initiative is gaining popularity among ECO Member States and beyond.

- So far six cities (Dushanbe, Sari, Ardabil, Shakhrisabz, Erzurum, and Shusha) across Member States have been designated as ECO Tourism Capitals.
- Annual celebration events in these cities unite tourism representatives, promoting business growth and partnerships.
- The Secretariat advocates for establishing a permanent structure, like a Network of ECO Tourism Capitals, to promote these cities consistently throughout the year and enhance cooperation.
- This initiative aligns with the ECO Vision 2025, aiming to strengthen local involvement in tourism activities.

Impediment (if any)

- Financial limitations

Possible Way Forward

- The Secretariat will draft a project proposal and present it for consideration at the next RPC meeting.
- The Secretariat plans to invite representatives from selected cities to join the Network for coordinating future joint activities.

No: DSG-Admin/2024/773

Priority: Most Urgent

Date: 12/6/2024

Attachment: No

The Secretariat of the Economic Cooperation Organization (ECO) presents its compliments to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Islamic Republic of Iran and the Embassies of the ECO Member States in Tehran, and with reference to the former's Note Verbale No. 767 dated June 9, 2024, has the honour to inform that, upon the request received from the Embassy of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan and in consultation with the Chair, the 5th Meeting of the ECO Vision 2025 Review Committee has been rescheduled for July 1, 2024 to be held at the ECO Secretariat.

The Review Committee will convene immediately following the 289th Meeting of the ECO Council of Permanent Representatives (CPR), also scheduled for July 1, 2024 at 1000 hours. It is further noted that the previously provided Zoom link will remain valid for online participation, if any, by the esteemed member countries.

The Secretariat of the Economic Cooperation Organization avails itself of this opportunity to renew to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Islamic Republic of Iran and the Embassies of the ECO Member States in Tehran, the assurances of its highest consideration.

All ECO Member States - Tehran





Economic Cooperation Organization

ECO

No: CFU/2024/589

Priority: Most Urgent

Date: 6/5/2024

Attachment: Yes

The Secretariat of the Economic Cooperation Organization (ECO) presents its compliments to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Islamic Republic of Iran and the Embassies of ECO Member States in Tehran and based on the decision of the 287th Meeting of CPR held on May 6, 2024 in ECO Secretariat in Tehran has the honour to enclose the revised version of the **ECO Work Programme-2024**.

The Secretariat has further the honour to state that as per the decision of 287th Meeting of CPR a **two-week silence procedure**, as of the date of this Note Verbale, is **observed for obtaining approval of the Council of Ministers (COM) with respect to the said document**.

The Secretariat avails itself of this opportunity to renew to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Islamic Republic of Iran and the Embassies of ECO Member States in Tehran the assurances of its highest consideration.

All ECO Member States - Tehran



No: CFU/2024/666

Priority: Most Urgent

Date: 21/5/2024

Attachment: Yes

The Secretariat of the Economic Cooperation Organization presents its compliments to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Islamic Republic of Iran and the Embassies of the Member States in Tehran and referring to its Note Verbale No. CFU/2024/589 dated May 6, 2024, whereby a two-week silence procedure was initiated for obtaining approval of COM with respect to **ECO Work Programme-2024** as endorsed at the 287th CPR Meeting held on May 6, 2024, has the honour to state the following.

Since the Secretariat was provided with some amendments to the ECO Work Programme-2024, within the time limit set for the procedure, from the Embassy of the Republic of Türkiye in Tehran via Note Verbale No. Z-2024/99530379/38121256 dated May 14, 2024 (*attached*), **the silence procedure would be considered broken.**

The said documents for which the silence procedure was adopted will be returned to CPR along with the proposed amendments and any further additional proposals that might be shared with the Secretariat for the required decision.

The Secretariat avails itself of this opportunity to renew to the esteemed Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Islamic Republic of Iran and the Embassies of the Member States in Tehran the assurances of its highest consideration.



All ECO Member States - Tehran



Z-2024/99530379/38121256 - MOST URGENT

The Embassy of the Republic of Türkiye presents its compliments to the Secretariat of the Economic Cooperation Organization (ECO) and with reference to the Latter's Note Verbale CFU/2024/589 dated 6 May 2024, has honour to inform the Esteemed Secretariat that the Embassy would like to propose an amendment to the second paragraph of the article 364 in ECO Work Programme 2024, which states "Considering that, to this date, the Charter of the Foundation and its Additional Protocol have only been ratified by five Member States, the Council invited the non-ratifying Member States to ratify the Charter and its Additional Protocol so that the Foundation may function at the maximum possible level in the field of STI, leading to economic development in the region."

The Embassy has further honour to propose omitting "...the Council invited..." part in the said article and considering two alternative writings to the said paragraph as such: i) "Considering that, to this date, the Charter of the Foundation and its Additional Protocol have only been ratified by five Member States, the delegation of Pakistan (and other ECOSF Member States) invited the non-ratifying Member States ratifying the Charter and its Additional Protocol so that the Foundation may function at the maximum possible level in the field of STI, leading to economic development in the region.", ii) "Considering that, to this date, the Charter of the Foundation and its Additional Protocol have only been ratified by five Member States, the Council discussed the issue of ratification of the Charter and its Additional Protocol by non-ratifying Member States."

The Embassy of the Republic of Türkiye avails itself of this opportunity to renew to the Secretariat of the Economic Cooperation Organization the assurances of its highest consideration.



**Secretariat of the
Economic Cooperation Organization
Tehran**

No: DSG-Admin/2024/777

Priority: Most Urgent

Date: 12/6/2024

Attachment: Yes

The Secretariat of the Economic Cooperation Organization (ECO) presents its compliments to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Islamic Republic of Iran and the Embassies of the ECO Member States in Tehran, and following the conclusions of the 287th and 288th Meetings of the ECO Council of Permanent Representatives (CPR), has the honour to provide a revised salary table in respect of Category-III Iranian Staff of the Secretariat, for esteemed Member States' kind consideration and views/comments, if any.

It is kindly noted that in developing the enclosed salary structure to be implemented as of July 1, 2024, the Secretariat has considered local social security requirements, ECO Staff Regulations and previous decisions of the COM, as well as similar standards/practices of other international organizations, maintaining equal remunerations for equal jobs without any nationality-based discrimination. This approach ensures compliance with relevant decision of the COM in a transparent and justified manner.

Nevertheless, it is important to highlight that should disagreements persist and the matter remain unresolved, the ECO Secretary General intends to bring the issue to the attention of the honourable ECO Foreign Ministers for their re-consideration, and to request their permission to address the identified discrepancies in the working group's recommendation before finalizing the implementation of the COM decision.

The Secretariat of the Economic Cooperation Organization avails itself of this opportunity to renew to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Islamic Republic of Iran and the Embassies of the ECO Member States in Tehran, the assurances of its highest consideration.

All ECO Member States - Tehran



1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Category	Grade	Basic Pay	Child Allowance	Increment	Conveyance Allowance	House Allowance	Gross Total US\$ (3+6+7)	Proportional deduction on account of Social Security Insurance premium.	Payable
Auxiliary Iranian Staff Cat III Staff	A3	799	80	60	121	598	1518	*	*
	A2	598	80	60	121	598	1317	*	*
	A1	400	80	60	121	598	1119	*	*

* Amount (s) to be reflected in column 9 will be separately calculated for due payment to the Social Security Organization on account of individuals Gross Salaries. The amount (s) in column 10 will be calculated after deduction of such payment (s) against each individual Category 3 Iranian Staff.

As agreed by CPR, the Category 3 Iranian Staff salary payment will remain intact in USD as per budget currency of the Organization.

All obligatory payments, as of the date of implementation of this salary structure, including all previously acquired Increments, End of Service benefit, Provident Fund and Leave Encashment etc, will also remain intact and will be payable at the time of separation.

The salary amount will be calculated and declared to the Social Security Organization according to the applicable exchange rate as and when required.

Accordingly necessary amendments will be made in the relevant part of the ECO Staff Regulations.



Economic Cooperation Organization

ECO

No:ADMN/2024/685

Priority: Normal

Date: 27/5/2024

Attachment: Yes

The Secretariat of the Economic Cooperation Organization (ECO) presents its compliments to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Islamic Republic of Iran and the Embassies of the ECO Member States in Tehran and has the honor to state that the post of Head of Section for Administration & Management (Category-I, D1) would fall vacant in the ECO Secretariat on completion of service tenure of Mr. Mojtaba Ramezani Ahmadabadi (**Iranian National**) on July 10, 2024.

The Member States are requested to kindly convey nomination(s) against the circulated post along with CVs of the nominee(s) at their early convenience. Detail of the required qualification and experience is attached. Upon receipt of nomination(s), the selection of candidate(s) would be processed for approval of the Council of Permanent Representatives (CPR) in accordance with the relevant provisions contained in the ECO Staff Regulations.

The Secretariat of the Economic Cooperation Organization (ECO) avails itself of this opportunity to renew to the esteemed Ministry and the esteemed Embassies the assurances of its highest consideration.



All ECO Member States - Tehran



Economic Cooperation Organization

ECO

No:/2024/778

Priority: Most Urgent

Date: 12/6/2024

Attachment: Yes

The Secretariat of the Economic Cooperation Organization presents its compliments to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Islamic Republic of Iran and the Embassies of the ECO Member States in Tehran and has the honor to enclose herewith a self-explanatory Note Verbale No. 531/2072759 dated June 2, 2024 received from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Islamic Republic of Iran, regarding extension in the service tenure of Mr. Mojtaba Ramezani Ahmadabadi **(Iran National)** till arrival of his successor.

The Secretariat of the Economic Cooperation Organization avails itself of this opportunity to renew to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Islamic Republic of Iran and the Embassies of the ECO Member States in Tehran, the assurances of its highest consideration.



All ECO Member States - Tehran



Islamic Republic of Iran
Ministry of Foreign Affairs

Unofficial translation

In the Name of God

Note

No: 531/2072759

Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Islamic Republic of Iran presents its compliments to the Secretariat of Economic Cooperation Organization (ECO) in Tehran and, with reference to its Note Verbal No. ADMN/2024/685 dated 27/5/2024, has the honor to inform that the internal process is underway to select successor of Mr. Mojtaba Ramezani Ahmadabadi (Head of Section for Administration & Management). Accordingly, his deputation to the Secretariat may be extended until the joining of his successor. It would be appreciated if the esteemed Secretariat takes necessary measures in this regard.

Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Islamic Republic of Iran avails itself of this opportunity to renew to the ECO Secretariat the assurances of its highest consideration.

2 June 2024

Secretariat of the Economic Cooperation Organization (ECO) - Tehran

شماره : ۵۳۱/۲۰۷۲۷۵۹
تاریخ : ۱۴۰۳/۰۳/۱۳
پیوست : دارد



فوری

به نام خدا

یادداشت

وزارت امور خارجه جمهوری اسلامی ایران با اظهار تعارفات خود به دبیرخانه سازمان همکاریهای اقتصادی (اگو) در تهران احتراماً اشعار می‌دارد:

بازگشت به یادداشت شماره ADMN/2024/685 مورخ ۷ خرداد ۱۴۰۳، به اطلاع می‌رساند فرآیند داخلی تعیین جانشین جناب آقای مجتبی رضانی احمدآبادی (مدیر بخش اداری) در دست اقدام می‌باشد. لذا دوره خدمت ایشان تا اعزام جانشین تمدید می‌شود. خواهشمند است اقدام لازم صورت گیرد.

موقع را مغتنم شمرده، احترامات فائقه را تجدید می‌نماید:

دبیرخانه سازمان همکاریهای اقتصادی (اگو) - تهران



Economic Cooperation Organization

ECO

No: ADMN/2024/781

Priority: Normal

Date: 13/6/2024

Attachment: Yes

The Secretariat of the Economic Cooperation Organization presents its compliments to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Islamic Republic of Iran and the Embassies of the ECO Member States in Tehran and has the honour to enclose herewith a self-explanatory Note Verbale No.ECO-7/3/2024-B/21/320 dated June 10, 2024 received from the Embassy of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan requesting inclusion of the agenda item regarding the post of Head of Section (Administration) in the 289th Meeting of Council of Ministers (CPR).

The Secretariat of the Economic Cooperation Organization avails itself of this opportunity to renew to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Islamic Republic of Iran and the Embassies of the ECO Member States in Tehran, the assurances of its highest consideration.



All ECO Member States - Tehran



By Fax

**Embassy of Pakistan
Tehran**

No. ECO-7/3/2024-B/21/320

10 June, 2024

The Embassy of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan in Tehran presents its compliments to the Secretariat of Economic Cooperation Organization in Tehran and has the honour to refer discussions regarding the post of Head of Section for Administration, at the 288th CPR Meeting, that were beyond the scope of already circulated agenda items. Hence it is requested that ECO Staff Rules may be followed for suitable transition as per the existing Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) laid down in the ECO Charter or as agreed by all the Member States at various CPR meetings in recent past rather than following past practices / precedents, if any, beyond ECO Charter. Hence it is emphasized that the same may please be included in the agenda of 289th CPR Meeting.

The Embassy of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan avails itself of this opportunity to renew to the Secretariat of Economic Cooperation Organization in Tehran, the assurances of its highest consideration.



**ECO Secretariat,
Tehran**



Economic Cooperation Organization

ECO

No: ADMN/2024/803

Priority: Normal

Date: 20/6/2024

Attachment: Yes

The Secretariat of the Economic Cooperation Organization presents its compliments to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Islamic Republic of Iran and the Embassies of the ECO Member States in Tehran and has the honor to enclose a copy of self-explanatory Note Verbale No. ECO-7/3/2024-B/23/85 dated June 13, 2024 received from the Embassy of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan regarding the extension till arrival of successor in respect of incumbent Head of Section for Administration & Management.

The Secretariat avails itself of this opportunity to renew to the esteemed Ministry and the Embassies of the ECO Member States in Tehran the assurances of its highest consideration.



All ECO Member States - Tehran



By Fax

**Embassy of Pakistan
Tehran**

No. ECO-7/3/2024-B/23/85

13 June, 2024

The Embassy of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan in Tehran presents its compliments to the Secretariat of Economic Cooperation Organization in Tehran and has the honour to refer this Embassy's earlier Note Verbale No. ECO-7/3/2024-B/21 dated 10 June, 2024 and ECO Secretariat's N.V. ADMN/2024/778 dated 12 June, 2024 has the honour to request that the desired extension may be postponed until the arrival of the new Secretary General ECO in August 2024. Since the formalities under ECO Rules & Regulations are also yet to be fulfilled and Administration & Management Section plays a sensitive role in disbursement of official matters by the SG's Office, the matter may kindly be referred to 289th CPR Meeting for deliberation among the member states.

The Embassy of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan avails itself of this opportunity to renew to the Secretariat of Economic Cooperation Organization in Tehran, the assurances of its highest consideration.



**ECO Secretariat,
Tehran**



Economic Cooperation Organization

ECO

No:ADMN/PER //2024/789

Priority: Urgent

Date: 19/6/2024

Attachment: Yes

The Secretariat of the Economic Cooperation Organization (ECO) presents its compliments to the Embassies of the ECO Member States in Tehran and has the honour to enclose a copy of Note Verbale No. 531/2090001 dated June 16, 2024 received from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Islamic Republic of Iran nominating Mr. Mehrdad Falahi (Iranian national) against the post of **Program Officer for Agriculture & Industry (Category-II, P2)** to replace incumbent Ms. Nayereh Sadat Mohseni (Iranian National).

The Secretariat of the Economic Cooperation Organization avails itself of this opportunity to renew to the Embassies of ECO Member States the assurances of its highest consideration.



All ECO Member States - Tehran



Economic Cooperation Organization

ECO

No: CFU/2024/787

Priority: Urgent

Date: 13/6/2024

Attachment: Yes

The Secretariat of the Economic Cooperation Organization presents its compliments to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Islamic Republic of Iran and the Embassies of the ECO Member States in Tehran and has the honour to enclose the **Draft Agenda and Annotated Draft Agenda of the 289th Meeting of CPR to be convened on July 1, 2024 (10:00 hours)** at the ECO Secretariat.

The Secretariat avails itself of this opportunity to renew to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Islamic Republic of Iran and the Embassies of the ECO Member States in Tehran the assurances of its highest consideration.



All ECO Member States - Tehran