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Draft Report
of the 18th Meeting of the
Council of Permanent Representatives of ECI (ECI-CPR)
(ECI Headquarters, February 23, 2015)

The Council of Permanent Representatives of ECO Cultural Institute (ECI) convened its 18th meeting at the ECO Headquarters on February 23, 2015 under the Chairmanship of the distinguished Representative of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan¹ of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan. The Meeting was attended by the representatives of the Islamic Republic of Iran, the Islamic Republic of Pakistan and Ambassador of the Republic of Tajikistan, as well as delegation of the ECO Secretariat and the ECO Cultural Institute. (List of Participants is enclosed as Annex D).

Agenda item 1

Adoption of the Agenda

The draft revised agenda of the Meeting which had been circulated among Member States vide Note No. ECI/524/1070 dated February 16, 2015 was adopted unanimously as follows:

1. Adoption of the Agenda,
2. Consideration and adoption of the Draft Reports of the 17th ECI-CPR meeting,
3. Report by ECI President,
4. Budgetary and administrative matters:
 - Consideration and Adoption of the Revised Budget for the year 2015,
5. Proposed Work Program for the Year 2015,
6. The Next Meeting of Board of Trustees (BoT),
7. Any other Business,
8. Date and Venue of the Next Meeting.

Agenda item 2

- The draft report of the 17th ECI-CPR meeting which had been circulated among Member States vide Note No. ECI/524/945 dated January 12, 2015 was adopted unanimously.

¹ Distinguished Representative of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan (Mr. Mohammad Afsar Rahbeen, Cultural Attaché) presided over the meeting in the absence of the honorable Ambassador of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan.

Agenda item 3

Report by ECI President on the ECI Activities

H.E Mr. Iftikhar Hussein Arif, ECI President made the following statement:

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Mr. Chairman,

H.E. Dr. Noor Mohammad Noor, Ambassador of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan

Excellencies, Ambassadors and Representatives of ECI Member States,

Ladies & Gentlemen,

I would like to express my profound gratitude to you for accepting our invitation and taking part in the 18th Meeting of the Council of Permanent Representatives (ECI-CPR).

As you know, the 25th Regional Planning Council Meeting of the Economic Cooperation Organization (ECO-RPC) will be held next week in Tehran. Tajikistan government has also announced readiness to host the 6th Board of Trustees Meeting (BOT) of ECI from 19 to 23 March 2015 that coincides with the celebration of Nowruz in Khujand. Thus, this meeting could prepare the ground for participating in Khujand meeting.

In regard with the Institute's activities since the previous CPR Meeting, I would like to inform you that on 22 January, 2015 ECI hosted the photography exhibition of young photographers from Afghanistan. I believe such activities will stand a far better chance of exerting influence on youth to know, more than ever before, different aspects of cultural and social commonalties among nations and thereby to go through with it.

The Institute also held ECI Winter Poetry Night in Tehran on 28 January, 2015 with the collaboration of Afghanistan Cultural attaché in Tehran which was attended by H.E. Ambassador of Afghanistan and outstanding poets from the Member States residing in Tehran. These programs set valuable experiences to revive and restore the traditions of our ancestors.

Last month, H.E. Ambassador of Pakistan visited the Institute and donated a series of books to ECI library on arts and culture of Pakistan on behalf of the National Books Foundation of Pakistan. With similar initiatives by the cultural centers from other Member Countries, there is hope that ECI's library would serve as a reliable and valuable center in Tehran to provide physical access to tangible material, as well as, on-line access through the Institute's website to all the researchers in the region.

I also wish to extend my gratitude to the Ministries of Culture of Afghanistan and Pakistan for introducing their focal points to ECI. I hope that the Ministries of Culture of Iran and Tajikistan will also introduce their focal points to coordinate cultural programs of the Institute within the ECO Region by means of establishing an effective and efficient network connection among the Member States.

Ladies, Gentlemen,

Regarding ECI financial status, I have the pleasure to inform you that as stated by the esteemed representative of the Islamic Republic of Iran in the previous meeting, the whole share of

the Islamic Republic of Iran for the year 2014 amounting \$171500 has been paid. In the meantime, ECI has also received about \$ 61,000.00 as a part of the annual contribution of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan for the year 2014. However, with this limited amount of budget, the Institute can actually bear only the current expenditures plus a few months program expenses coverage. ECI, without having timely and full contribution of the Member States, is unable to develop and realize effective medium-term planning of its cultural activities which are hindered by such shortcomings.

An overview of **ECI's Work Program** in the coming year is on the agenda of today's meeting. The plan includes main initiatives hierarchically arranged and implementation of which requires in time budget provision as well as collaboration of the cultural authorities of the Member States. As reflected within documents, the proposed annual budget for ECI's cultural programs in the year 2015 amounts to \$43000. The Institute, with respect to the priorities based on the two criteria listed above, will make effort to implement its programs and activities.

As you know, during the previous meeting, the consideration and adoption of **ECI's 2015 Revised Budget** was postponed to this meeting. In the interim, Afghanistan's government approved this amendment which includes the addition of 10% to the salaries of ECI official staffs. Noteworthy is that despite the rising inflation and high costs of living in the host country during the past four years, salaries of ECI official staffs have not increased while the salaries of our colleagues in the ECO Secretariat have increased 10% since 2014. As previously mentioned, this amount has no effect on ECI's total budget including programs expenditures of the Institute and financial contributions of Member States. ECI'S Executive Director will explain to you in detail about this.

Excellencies,

While, I appreciate the Islamic Republic of Iran for the full-fledged support as well as voluntary contributions to the Institute in 2014 and the years preceding, I would like to announce that despite our concerns regarding the building where **ECI headquarters** is stationed, no response has been received so far.

A while ago, ECI was unofficially offered to agree the allocation of some parts of the building including the diplomatic gallery, but not the Shams Hall. Recently, according to the information obtained from unofficial sources, another part of the building is supposed to be allotted to a third party. If this is true, then chaos and disorganization will grow in the management of the Institute, including the disruption of daily activities, payment of utility costs and programs of ECO Cultural Institute. While lack of office space is one of problems the Institute is facing, Shams Foundation does not use the office space at its disposal due to the lack of funds and staffs.

The constraints imposed on ECI by Shams Foundation have not only impeded the cultural activities of the Institute, but the seasonal programs held by this NGO in Shams Hall and gallery such as theatre performances, public ticket sale and gathering a mass audience have also reached to an intolerable point. I have informed the permanent representatives and the host government that with the above NGO, ECI is deprived of the minimum diplomatic immunity and security.

Unfortunately, I must announce that the activities done under the name of ECI yet without its permission have discomforted the working space of the Institute. Such is not the case and worse

when it comes to the time that there are works to be done overtime for administrative preparations related to cultural programs. If you come to the institute after office hours, you will see this is impossible because of the inconvenience caused by the public audience.

Such is the case while ECI has the potentials to host numerous cultural events throughout the year in coordination with ECO Member States in the hall and gallery. The regional and cultural activities will more benefit to the host governments.

Hence, I hereby request the esteemed representative of the Islamic republic of Iran to officially convey this part of my statement through the Ministry of Foreign Affairs to the Ministry of Culture and Islamic Guidance of the Islamic Republic of Iran and thereby to take appropriate action to determine the status of the building before the next ECI's Board of Trustees (BOT) meeting in Khujand.

As I mentioned earlier, ECI's 6th Board of Trustees meeting will be held from 19 to 23 March, 2015 in Khujand, Tajikistan. I hereby wish to express my heartfelt gratitude to H.E. Shamsiddin Orumbekzadeh, the Cultural Minister of the Republic of Tajikistan for his support to provide the ground to convene the BOT meeting in Khujand. I hope that through active participation of honorable Ministers and delegations of Member States, positive and fruitful results would be achieved for ECI.

Thank you

(Under what agenda item)

Representative of the Islamic Republic of Iran: assured that the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Islamic Republic of Iran is endeavouring to provide a resolution for ECI premises.

President of ECI: declared that ECI will follow the decision of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in this regard. ECI is assured that the Ministry will act in the interest of the Institute.

Agenda item 4

Budgetary matters:

Consideration and Adoption of the Revised Budget for the year 2015,

Executive Director of ECI: made some clarification on the revised budget of ECI for the year 2015. Despite there had been discussions in the 17th ECI-CPR meeting about the equalization of salaries of the ECI staff members with those of the ECO Secretariat, it is not what ECI is seeking. Indeed, the Institute has requested an increase of 10 per cent in the salaries of its official staff. The salaries of the staff of the ECO Secretariat have increased by 10 percent in 2014 but there had been no increment for the ECI staff members over the past few years. Taking into account the high inflation rates in the host country during the last 4 years and the fact that the last increase in ECI salaries has taken place about 4 years ago, therefore, the Institute requests the member states to support and adopt the modest increase of 10 percent to its staff salaries. The requested increment will have no financial implication on the annual contributions of the member states **for the year 2014**. He explained that the Institute made a saving of 30 thousand dollars in 2014 due to the absence from work of two staff members for almost 10 months. Also an amount of 20 thousand dollars has

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been saved in the same period due to receipt of contributions from two member states in late 2014. The overall saving for the year 2014 equals to 50 thousand dollars.

The Executive Director stated that the Institute has also saved an amount of 550 thousand dollars as the General Reserve Fund over the past 6 years. Thus the requested increase will be paid out of the saving.

He informed that, the ECI revised budget for the year 2015, has already been approved by the

Islamic Republic of Afghanistan.

Representative of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan: informed that the **ECI budget is under the process of approval in the Ministry of Information Broadcasting and National Heritage. The Institute will be informed once approval is received. The Embassy has no authority to approve ECI budget without clearance from Pakistan.** embassy in Tehran has not received the approval for the ECI revised proposed budget for the year 2015 from the government of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan, so he or embassy is not in the position to approve any issue regarding the ECI's budget. He proposed that since the Ministers of Cultures of the member states have the authority to decide on about the ECI's budget, the Institute may, **therefore,** raise this issue as well as the status of its premises in the upcoming BoT meeting.

He also inquired about the implications of the proposed increase in salary on the overall share of the Member States.

He declared that despite the requested increment will not result in any financial implication for the member states in the current year, it will be an annual increase, and therefore, what will be the rate of annual contribution of the member states in coming years. He also inquired how the increment will not affect the program budget.

Executive Director of ECI: noted that there has been no objection to the ECI's budget for the year 2015 in the 16th ECI-CPR meeting and it has already been approved. The quote from the adopted report of the meeting is as follows:

"Chairman announced the approval of the Council to the ECI's budget for the year 2015 as no objection raised by the representatives of the Member States."

The excerpt was stipulated under the item: Consideration and Adoption of ECI's Draft Budget for 2015.

The Executive Director clarified that the annual contribution of the member states has been remained unchanged for 5 years. The outstanding arrears of the member states have equaled to 600 thousand dollars by the end of the year 2014, excluded the annual contribution for the year 2015. Taking into consideration the aforesaid General Reserve Fund as well, there will be no need to increase the annual contribution of the member states for 5 coming years at least. However, the Institute plans to propose to the upcoming BoT meeting an increase of 25 per cent in annual contributions of the member states, to be effective from the year 2016 onward.

Representative of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan: expressed that the Ambassador of Pakistan **had** mentioned that the approval of the aforesaid budget needs **some more time, and will be conveyed shortly.** therefore, it is still under consideration. He also **clarified** emphasized that **Ambassador had** he has not approved the budget on behalf of the Government of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan in the previous ECI-CPR meetings.

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Chairman (Representative of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan): endorsed the approval of the ECI's budget for the year 2015 in the previous ECI-CPR meetings. He requested the member states to inform the ECI of their comments and observations regarding the draft ECI-CPR reports in advance to upcoming meeting.

Representative of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan: noted that **statements of the delegates shall not be reflected in the minutes out of context. As from Pakistan's point of view, the ECI budget has yet not been approved; therefore,** the decision of the chairman cannot be imposed on the member states.

~~Regarding the increment in the salary of ECI Member staff as those of ECO Secretariat conducted, He clarified that the situation in the ECO Secretariat is different than the ECI. There are more member states and a larger amount of budget in the Secretariat.~~

~~He noted that to his personal understanding, the future of the Institute is not clear. He declared that the non member states of the ECI should be informed that the Institute is functioning very smoothly, it is very vibrant. But unfortunately it is the other way around. The other 6 ECO member states are not willing to join ECI. Their question is what has been achieved out of this organization.~~

~~Executive Director of ECI: noted that the increment in the salaries of the ECI staff members, the issues of the Institute's premises and its performance are quite different matters. Assessment of ECI performance is not a matter to be discussed at this level, it is within the authority of the Heads of the member states to comment on the issue. Despite the financial constraints, the Institute's performance over the past two years has been much more efficient than ever.~~

~~President of ECI: clarified that he is surprised with the observation made by the representative of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan. He expressed gratitude to the honorable Ambassador of the Pakistan who at the 17th ECI-CPR meeting, very categorically appreciated the works done by the ECI in spite of budgetary and financial constraints. Despite financial constraints, the Institute tries to manage its programs. As the Executive Director very rightly pointed out, over the past two years, the Institute has had a valuable performance and its impact in the area of culture in the member states is tremendous. The press coverage in the ECI member states testifies the significant contribution of the Institute over the past two years.~~

~~He noted that how the Institute could expect that its members of staff continue to work with the same salary paid for the past year. It is not a norm in any international organization. At least the inflation rate and economic condition of the host country should be considered.~~

Representative of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan: clarified that he personally is not objecting the 10 per cent increment in the salary of the ECI staff members but he is not in the position to approve that **without clearance from headquarter**.

President of ECI: requested the representative of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan to follow up the approval of the ECI revised budget for the year 2015 with the concerned authorities.

He noted that all other ECI member states has approved the Institute's budget for the year 2014, and no approval, nor has any comment been received from Pakistan yet. There should be a time limit for approval.

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Representative of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan: fully endorsed ECI President's point of view that **there shall be a limit to get response from the Member States. He further stated** noted that in the ECO Secretariat, Kazakhstan has not approved the budget **for the year 2015, and their response has been reflected as it is in the report. He suggested that as long as formal approval is received from Pakistan, our actual position shall be indicated in the minutes, instead of writing that Pakistan has approved the budget.**—and it is continued, but their comments have been reflected in the reports of the related meetings.

The meeting endorsed that the ECI can assume its revised budget for the year 2015 as adopted subject to the formal approval from the Government of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan.

Agenda item 5

Proposed Work Program for the Year 2015

Executive Director of ECI: referred to the request by the distinguished ambassador of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan in the 17th ECI-CPR meeting for provision of estimates on the costs of functions envisaged in the ECI calendar of events, and briefed the meeting on the approximate estimates made by the Institute. He noted that the amount spent in the year 2014 on cultural programs of ECI had been much more than the approved program budget for the year. The extra ~~budgetary spent~~ amount **spent** was provided through reduction in ongoing expenditures and voluntary contribution by the Islamic Republic of Iran. He emphasized that implementation of this program will be subject to availability of fund and collaboration of relevant authorities in member states.

The Executive Director encouraged the member states for hosting cultural programs in cooperation with the Institute. He referred to the first ECO Chess Cup in 2014 which received international recognition, organized by the ECI in the Islamic Republic of Iran, and kindly requested the other member states to cooperate with the Institute to hold the second edition of the competition. He noted that the expenditures for players from the ECI member states will be borne by the Institute, and the host country will pay for the other players from the other ECO member states.

President of ECI: noted that the ECI proposed programs for the year 2015, had been already endorsed by the esteemed cultural attaches of the member states in a separate meeting held earlier.

Agenda item 6

Next Meeting of Board of Trustees (BoT)

Ambassador of the Republic of Tajikistan: briefed the meeting on the arrangements which has been made for organization of the 6th meeting of the Board of Trustees of the ECO Cultural Institute preceded by the 5th meeting of the High Level Experts Group. The details had been circulated to the member states vide verbale note by ECI.

Representative of the Islamic Republic of Iran: assured that the Ministry of Foreign Affairs will inform ECI of the composition of the Iranian delegation to take part in the upcoming BoT meeting.

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Representative of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan: hoped that the Minister of Culture of his

Pakistan will participate in the upcoming Bot meeting, but it has not been confirmed yet.

Agenda

item 6

Any other

business

No matter was raised under this agenda item.

Agenda item 8

Date and Venue of the next Meeting

The council unanimously agreed that the next meeting of the ECI-CPR to be held on March 17, 2015 in the Institute to make the final revision of the issues to be proposed to the 6th ECI-BoT meeting in Khujand, Tajikistan.