

Draft Report
of the 34th Meeting of the
Council of Permanent Representatives of ECI (ECI-CPR)
(ECI Headquarters, 29 August 2021)

The Council of Permanent Representatives of ECO Cultural Institute (ECI) convened its 34th meeting at the ECI Headquarters on 29 August 2021. The meeting began under the chairpersonship of H.E. Mr. Rahim Hayat Qureshi, Ambassador of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan to Iran. The Meeting was attended by the representatives of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan, the Islamic Republic of Iran, the Islamic Republic of Pakistan and Republic of Tajikistan, as well as a delegation of the ECO Cultural Institute. (List of Participants is enclosed as **Annex. I**).

Agenda item 1

Adoption of the Agenda

- The draft agenda of the meeting which had been circulated among Member States vide Note No. ECI/524/398 dated 8 August 2021, was unanimously adopted as follows:
 1. Adoption of the Agenda,
 2. Consideration and adoption of the draft report of the previous ECI-CPR meeting,
 3. Statement by ECI President on the ECI activities,
 4. Budgetary issues:
 - Latest status of contributions and arrears of the ECI member states
 5. Administrative matters:
 - Nomination of Mr. Mohsen Esmaeilyfard for the post of Executive Director at ECI
 6. Consideration and adoption of ECI's proposed/planned activities/programs (List enclosed as *Annex I*)
 7. Any other Business,
 8. Date and venue of the next meeting.

Agenda item 2

Consideration and adoption of the draft report of the previous ECI-CPR meeting

- The draft report of the 33rd ECI-CPR meeting which had been circulated among the Member States vide Note No. ECI/524/302 dated 13 June 2021 was adopted.

Agenda item 3
Statement by ECI President

H.E. Sarvar Bakhti, ECI President made the following statement:

***Mr. Chairman,
Honorable Ambassadors and Representatives of the ECO Member States ,
Ladies and Gentlemen ,***

I would like to take this opportunity to thank you all for your attendance in this meeting.

*Excellencies,
Since the last ECI-CPR meeting we have conducted a variety of activities as follows:*

To strengthen the network connection among the national libraries, the 5th meeting of ECO Heads of National Libraries was held online on 15 June 2021. Although the meeting had postponed two times and it was really difficult to bring together all the ECO member states for the third time, thanks to ECI's continuous efforts and follow-ups , delegations of all the member states took part in the meeting. Also, ECI took the initiative and upon the Institute's proposal, the meeting was held virtually for the first time. The purpose of this meeting was to exchange views on common issues of the National Libraries of the member countries and to create a new chapter of cooperation in cultural interactions at the regional level and to share experiences during the Covid-19 pandemic.

The meeting, organized in cooperation with Iran's National Library as the host, was participated by authorities from most of the ECO member states as well as President of the International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions (IFLA) and Acting Representative of UNESCO Cluster Office.

As mentioned in the previous meeting of the ECI-CPR, ECI and the authorities in charge of the ECO Park inked a MoU during a ceremony held on 9 June 2021, participated by the ambassadors and representatives of the ECO member states and the Iranian Deputy Foreign Minister on Economic Diplomacy. The Park is available for holding events proposed by the esteemed member states. Also, for decorating the Park with tourist attractions and cultural elements of the ECO member states, ECI has proposed a collection of photos of the landmarks of each member state to the esteemed Embassy of the country for confirmation or further proposals. The images will be engraved on a decorative wall, which is located in the exclusive area of each country. Further details have already been circulated vide a Note Verbale. ECI requests the esteemed member states to kindly convey to the Institute their views at the earliest possible time.

*Ladies and gentlemen,
As envisaged in the Charter of ECO Cultural Institute as a mandate to preserve cultural heritage, ECI co-hosted an online conference titled "Embracing the momentum of Nature as Intangible Heritage; revisiting the seasonal rituals in the ancient civilization of Asia". The event was held in collaboration with Shahid Beheshti University.*

Dear Colleagues,

As you are well aware, promoting sports activities are among the objectives mentioned in our Charter. In this regard, ECI has supported Ms. Rashin Jahanbani, an Iranian female mountaineer to scale Somoni peak as the first woman from ECO region who climbs the highest peaks of Tajikistan as a messenger of friendship between nations. Now the flag of ECO Cultural Institute is flying on top of the Peak.

Also, ECI has started negotiations with relevant authorities for organizing the first wrestling tournament of ECO member state to be held before Nowruz.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Regarding publications of ECI, we have published two books: "World Intangible Heritage in the ECO Region" which is the collection of intangible heritage of all the ten member states inscribed in UNESCO Intangible Cultural Heritage List and "Modern Poetry of Iran" (in English), which is a poetry collection of the contemporary Iranian poets. A copy of both books are on the table before you.

In addition, we will soon publish a book on Allama Iqbal titled " Our Iqbal" which is a detailed bibliography in two volumes addressing all the books, papers and articles on Allama Iqbal published in Iran since 1928 to date. The author of the book is an Iranian scholar who had been studying in Pakistan for several years. The editing of the content is in its finished state and we are planning for a launching on birth anniversary of Allama Iqbal.

Furthermore, we have recently published the sixth issue of ECO Cultural Institute cultural digest, entitled ECI Newsletter. The publication covers historical, cultural, social, literary, sports and artistic events in the ECO member states as well as news from the ECO Cultural Institute from May to June 2021.

Excellencies,

We attach a great importance to recommendations of ECI-CPR and our distinguished member states. Therefore, we have started preparation of booklets on all the ECI commemorations, and webinars, which contain the full text of speeches and papers presented in the events. Our team of professional staff are working hard to compile, transcribe, edit and translate the contents.

Excellencies,

As mentioned in the last meeting, at the proposal of the Government and the Embassy of Tajikistan, we published a special issue of our quarterly journal, ECO Heritage, on Dushanbe tourist attractions.

Once again, the other esteemed ECO Member States may also propose to ECI to publish special issues of the journal on their top historic cultural cities or any other subject of their interest.

To pay tribute to important figures of the ECO region, ECI holds series of commemoration ceremonies, participated by scholars, researchers and authors from various ECO member states. In this regard, ECI organized an international seminar to honor Prof. Abdul Hai Habibi, the famous Afghan writer, editor, historian and researcher. The meeting was attended by prominent

scholars from Afghanistan, Iran, Pakistan, and some western orientalist from Oxford University as well as representatives of the Embassies of the ECO member states who discussed thoughts and works of this prominent personality.

Furthermore, to mark the birth anniversary of Abu Ali Sina and to recognize his scientific position, an international conference titled "A Review of Abu Ali Sina (Avicenna) Thought and Knowledge" was held virtually by ECO Cultural Institute in cooperation with Allame Tabataba'i University. At the webinar eminent scholars from Iran, Afghanistan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan delivered speeches on the origins of Abu Ali Sina`s thoughts and philosophical foundations, his works and position in medical history and his role in science and philosophy.

In addition, as envisaged in the ECI's Work Program and Calendar of Events for the year 2021, which was endorsed by the Regional Planning Council, ECI has started preparation for holding commemoration of Faiz Ahmad Faiz, the prominent Pakistani poet and author. We hope that all the member states and their scholars actively participate in the commemoration.

Also, to promote the art of calligraphy as a common heritage in the ECO Region, ECI has started an online free course on handwriting calligraphy presented by a prominent Afghan calligraphy master.

Excellencies,

Above all, the 5th round of the Young Scientists Festival, titled "The Century Festival", is to be held in November 30, 2021 with the support of the ECO Cultural Institute.

Dear colleagues,

To preserve and promote handicrafts in ECO Region, ECI in partnership with Hima Art Group organized the second exhibition of "Nakh-o Negareh". The event aims to identify artists and doyens of traditional arts of ECO member countries to promote and disseminate the knowledge, techniques and skills of traditional arts and to transfer methods to the generations to come. In this regard, ECI staff made great efforts to collect artworks from across the ECO region. We highly appreciate the active cooperation of the member states with ECI.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

To make arrangements for the teaching of the languages of the Region which is among the key objectives of the Institute, ECI in partnership with Sa`adi Foundation will hold an online Persian course for the members of diplomatic corps. It will be a starter course and is gratis. Further details will be communicated shortly.

Excellencies,

Regarding the proposed projects in the 33rd meeting of ECI-CPR, as urged by the Council, ECI circulated a Note Verbale among the member states containing further details.

Also, as you may notice, we have provided relevant details about our proposed activities for the months ahead. We hope that they receive the approval of this Council, so that we may proceed with them. Regarding Afghan Film Week, which is the last item in the table of ECI programs and

activities, we were ready to organize the event but the program will be postponed due to the current situation in Afghanistan.

*Excellencies,
Once again, I would like to express my gratitude to you for taking part in this meeting.
Thank you.*

Agenda item 4

Budgetary matters:

- Latest status of contributions and arrears of the ECI member states

President of ECI briefed the meeting on the latest financial situation of the ECI. He appreciated the Islamic Republic of Pakistan for the payment of its annual contribution for 2020. He also informed that the Republic of Tajikistan has paid its annual contribution for 2021.

He further noted that as informed in the last meeting, ECI is still facing financial constraints and unable to pay the end of service gratuity and provident fund of two member staffs from Afghanistan and Iran who have already completed their service.

With regards to the recent developments in one of the ECI's member states, it is anticipated that the annual contribution of that respective member state would not be received until a considerable amount of time, which, in turn would lead to a more difficult financial situation for ECI.

The esteemed member states are kindly requested to take necessary measures to accelerate their payments.

Representative of the Islamic Republic of Iran assured that although the administration in Iran is changing, Ministry of Foreign Affairs would make every effort to find a solution to pay its outstanding arrears.

Representative of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan informed that payments of Pakistan's arrears is in process. It is hoped that the arrears would be settled in the next few months.

He referred to the problem of transferring the annual contribution for the year 2017 and informed that the same has happened to the contribution of Pakistan, so the date of the payment is uncertain. He explained that the Embassy of Pakistan in Tehran is in touch with the relevant authorities and then it would be discussed with the council about how to proceed the payment.

He recommended that the ECI member states may convince the other ECO member states to join ECI and the Institute would be a full-fledged specialized agency to operate in full swing and make optimum pursuit of its agenda and annual activities.

Representative of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan clarified that the arrears of Afghanistan should be divided in two parts, one is the annual contribution for 2021 and the other part for 2017. The Government of Afghanistan was planning to pay its share for the year 2021, unfortunately, due to the current situation of the country, , as the representative of Pakistan rightly mentioned, the problem with Halkbank for transferring the money for 2017 still exists. In this regard, the Embassy has communicated with the ECO Secretariat and the relevant authorities of the Government of Afghanistan and assured to find a solution.

Representative of the Republic of Tajikistan explained that the outstanding arrears of Tajikistan, as mentioned in ECI's financial reports, belongs to the years ago when Tajikistan was not even represented at the ECI. However, Tajikistan has been paying its due annual contribution to ECI timely.

He requested the ECI-CPR to consider the possibility to write off the aforementioned outstanding arrears.

Representative of the Islamic Republic of Iran referred to a similar case about Uzbekistan which occurred in the ECO Secretariat and part of the arrears of the country was written off as decided by the ministers. It could also be considered at the ECI..

He further noted that this is not the immediate concern of the organization. The upcoming ECO Summit would be held on November 28, 2021. It is proposed that the issue of the necessity for enlargement of the ECI would be raised in the upcoming summit. ECO has ten member states and if one or two members were in arrears with their due annual contribution, the other member states would pay their share so there would be no financial problems to directly impact on the functioning of the organization.

The Summit and the preparatory meetings would give an opportunity to encourage other ECO member states to accede to the ECI in which some ECO member states have already showed interest. The first and foremost candidate could be Turkmenistan, which is hosting the event. Iran as the host country is ready to engage in informal consultations with the relevant authorities in this regard.

Representative of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan clarified that the rules and procedures do not indicate that representation is a precondition to have a mandatory contribution, but anyhow, the issue could be considered. In the past, the president of ECI was from Iran for eight times, however, it affected neither the functionality nor the contributions. Therefore, this is an issue which needs input from the member states in order to be presented to CoM for approval. A committee could be established to bring in administrative reforms, and to make proposals for kind approval of the Council as it was done in the ECO Secretariat.

The requests of the member states need to be aligned with the rules and procedures. Regarding the case of outstanding arrears of Uzbekistan, despite it was a pragmatic decision taken to write off the arrears, most of the member states were of the view that it is not good to set such procedure where member states can advance a request for waiver because the member states have to make these organizations run and in order to do so, all have to contribute more in order to achieve the envisaged objectives.

Chair recommended that the ECI may come up with some suggestions on encouragement of the other ECO member states to join the Institute. These could be discussed in the next meetings before the Summit.

President of ECI thanked all the comments by the member states. He assured that the ECI takes the necessary measures for attracting new member states. In this regard, It is very likely that Turkey would become a ratifying member state. Also, we are cooperating with Uzbekistan and Azerbaijan and hope that in near future they would become new member states of our Institute. To this end, we need support from the member states.

The ECI-CPR urged ECI to consider increasing membership and enlargement of the Institute and come up with some suggestions on encouragement of the other ECO member states to join the Institute. These could be discussed in the upcoming meetings before the Summit.

Agenda item 5

Administrative matters:

- Nomination of Mr. Mohsen Esmaeilyfard for the post of Executive Director at ECI

President of ECI briefed the meeting that the nomination had been made by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Islamic of Iran vide a Note Verbale. Subsequently, ECI has circulated among the member states the Note Verbale and the CV of the nominated Executive Director.

Representative of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan elaborated that ECI is a cultural Institute and coordination with local authorities should be effectively made. In this regard, when the post of President at ECI was transferred to Tajikistan, it was decided that the Executive Director would be from Iran.

He added that the appointment is welcomed and with his strong CV, it is hoped that he would be able to advance the agenda of ECI, and the member states would have more effective cooperation with the ECI in future.

Representative of the Islamic Republic of Iran appreciated support from Pakistan and stated that two posts of Assistant Director were approved by the ECI-CPR for Afghanistan and Pakistan respectively. Their nomination is still awaited.

Regarding the new Executive Director of ECI, he informed that the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Iran would coordinate with the ECI on the date of assumption of duties by the Executive Director to determine a proper starting point and avoid further financial burden on the Institute for the time being.

Agenda item 6

- Consideration and adoption of ECI's proposed/planned activities/programs (List enclosed as *Annex II*)

Regarding the publication of a book of poems by Loiq Sherali, people's poet of Tajikistan, Representative of the Islamic Republic of Iran made a query on the probable date of publication and the reason that the book has not been published yet while ECI had already released two books.

President of ECI explained that we are cooperating with the Embassy of Tajikistan and waiting for the finalized contents of the book to be conveyed by the Embassy.

Representative of the Republic of Tajikistan informed that the contents of the book was ready and would be sent to ECI at the earliest.

Regarding the 3rd ECO Photo & Poster Festival, Representative of the Islamic Republic of Iran inquired whether the cash awards for the three top winners of the Festival is funded by ECI or any third party is going to sponsor the Festival and how much the cash awards are.

President of ECI spelled out that the ECI was looking for the sponsors and hopes to finally find some companies to contribute to the cultural programs. The total amount of the cash prizes equals to 5000 USD, which is not a considerable amount.

Representative of the Islamic Republic of Iran proposed to delay the Festival if there is no harm. It is preferred that ECI would award the winners, because fundraising is quite limited according to the Charter of the Institute. Thus, the Institute cannot raise funds from every sources and the Festival may be postponed until the ECI is in a better financial situation.

About cooperation with the authorities of the city of Sari, Iran on the occasion of declaration of Sari as the tourism capital of the ECO region in 2022, Representative of the Islamic Republic of Iran welcomed the idea and hoped that it would be done for other cities in other member states as well. Then, he queried about the activities ECI is going to carry out jointly with the local authorities of the city or the province. Ministry of Foreign Affairs should be informed before any coordination with the local authorities.

With respect to the basic Persian speaking course in partnership with Sa`adi Foundation, Representative of the Islamic Republic of Iran declared that although it is in compliance with ECI's Charter to make arrangement for the teaching of the languages of the region, it is better to promote other languages in Iran, and Farsi in other ECO countries. Although the target group is diplomats, it could be done by Saadi Foundation on its own without ECI.

President of ECI confirmed that ECI should pay more attention to teaching the other common languages in the ECO region but this is the first experience of ECI and the target group as rightly mentioned is members of diplomatic corps. ECI welcomes any proposal from the member states to jointly organize their language courses in Iran or any other member states.

Representative of the Islamic Republic of Iran emphasized that the ECI should encourage Sa`adi Foundation to cooperate with its counterparts in the other member states. The Institute may find such organizations in the other member states and convince them for mutual cooperation with Sa`adi Foundation.

President of ECI explained that it would be a free course and Sa`adi Foundation is one of the best Institutes with professional teachers and State-of-the-art educational methods. The Foundation has run Persian courses in numerous countries.

Representative of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan declared that it is a good program but if ECI could circulate it among the member states, they can have an extended mandate of this program.

If the details are conveyed to the Embassies of the ECO member states, it could be shared in Pakistan as well. Since it is an online course, more participants could be from the other member states, if they are interested.

Representative of the Republic of Tajikistan also supported the program and called it very useful for all the diplomats of the ECO member states.

Regarding a joint cultural event by the ECO member states participating in Expo 2022 Dubai to introduce common Nowruz festivities, Representative of the Islamic Republic of Iran supported the idea as an excellent proposal to promote Nowruz. He added that it is a very important event and Iran is preparing its pavilion.

He referred to the details of the proposal and asked if a date had been registered in the calendar of events of the Expo for a joint program in this regard.

The Delegation of ECI elaborated that a program to introduce common Nowruz festivities had been registered in the calendar of events of the Expo through a partnership between ECI and Roudaki Foundation of Iran. In fact, the Foundation made the necessary arrangements and requested the ECI to invite the member states, having pavilions in the Expo, to kindly propose their events/ programs related to Nowruz.

Representative of the Islamic Republic of Iran requested ECI to share the approved calendar of events of the Expo with member states and voiced the readiness of the Islamic Republic of Iran to cooperate in this regard.

About the First Meeting of Craft Artists of the ECO Region, Representative of the Islamic Republic of Iran noted that it has been discussed in the last ECI-CPR meeting.

He reiterated that if the meeting is at the level of artists, how they are supposed to make strategies for increasing public awareness (as mentioned in details about the meeting), while the strategies are made by decision-makers not by artists.

In addition, it needs to be clarified that it is an intergovernmental meeting and governments would designate some artists as their own representatives or ECI is inviting some artists through the Embassies of the ECO member states.

Another point, as mentioned in the last ECI-CPR meeting, is that the Islamic Republic of Iran does not consent to any idea to establish any institution or mechanisms outside ECI. It should be noted that networking is quite important and ECI should facilitate it. There should be no affiliated establishment outside ECI in Iran. The delegation of the Islamic Republic of Iran in the ECI-CPR has reiterated many times in the previous ECI-CPR meetings that the Institute must have its Headquarters only in Iran and one branch in each of its member states. There is no need to establish more cultural organizations in Iran under the name of ECI or ECO. He further noted that ECI's mandate is to promote cultural cooperation among all member states.

If ECI is planning to make network among all craft artists in the region, it is fine but no public or private institute other than ECI should be entitled to proceed with that and take advantage of ECO or ECI logo and name.

ECI President explained that it is not an intergovernmental meeting. ECI is planning to cooperate with the handicrafts associations of the 10 member states. In addition, ECI would make efforts to create platforms where the handicrafts from all the ECO member states could be presented and the craft artists would have the opportunity to exchange views, to cooperate to organize some exhibitions, to hold workshops, and so on.

Regarding ECI's Friendship Ambassadors Program, Representative of the Islamic Republic of Iran stated that although it is a good idea, it is too complicated. The title of ECI's Friendship Ambassadors should be changed to Friendship Ambassadors of ECO Region. ECI doesn't need ambassadors of friendship; rather, there should be friendship ambassadors for the region to enhance the visibility of the region within or outside.

He referred to the details under the section "Briefing a Friendship Ambassador Candidate" where it is indicated that "The President/eligible ECI official seeking to consider and nominate a person as Friendship Ambassador may wish to interview the candidate." The nomination should not be made by an official at the ECI. The member states may nominate candidates. Thus, there would be 10 nominations from 10 ECO member states. Also, the ambassadors could be designated based on areas of activities determined by the ECI. For instance, ECI may inform the member states that in ten areas the Institute needs to designate ambassadors of friendship and the member states nominate prominent figures in the required areas.

He emphasized that ECI would better focus on increasing its member states instead of such activities, which would add nothing to the Institute because these celebrities have their own agenda and it would not be certain if they could adapt to the Institute's concerns and observations.

ECI President requested the Representative of the Islamic Republic of Iran to advise ECI of the comments and observations of the Islamic Republic of Iran vide a Note Verbale. The details of the program are negotiable.

Chair recommended that the proposed program could be discussed in the upcoming meetings after it had revised by the ECI.

About the Afghan Film Week, President of ECI informed that ECI was ready to organize the event but due to the current situation in Afghanistan, it would be postponed

Agenda item 7

Any other business

No matter raised under this agenda item.

Agenda item 8

Date and venue of the next meeting

The ECI will fix the date of the meetings after consultation with the member states and circulate the details among the member states.

Annex-I

**The 34th Meeting of the
ECI Council of Permanent Representatives (CPR)**

List of Participants

Embassy of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan:

- Mr. Abdul Ghani Farahi, Second Secretary and in charge of ECO and Economic Affairs

Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Islamic Republic of Iran:

- Dr. Seyed Jalaeddin Alavi Sabzevari, Director General, Multilateral and International Economic Cooperation
- Mr. Kosravi, Expert, ECO Affairs Bureau

Embassy of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan:

- H.E. Rahim Hayat Qureshi, Ambassador
- Mr. Mian Azmat Farooq, First Secretary

Embassy of the Republic of Tajikistan:

- Mr. Bahrom Azimov, Second Secretary

ECO Cultural Institute:

- H.E. Sarvar Bakhti, President
- Ms. Mirbagheri, External Relations
- Mr. Sayed Javad Mirkazemian, Accounts Officer
- Mr. Shah Mansur Khojeov, Tajikistan's Desk Officer
- Ms. Mahtab Sahel, Afghanistan's Desk Officer
- Mr. Mehdi Omraninejad, Expert
- Ms. Nastaran Nosratzadegan, Interpreter

Annex II

ECI's Proposed/Planned Activities/Programs

	Program	Date	Venue
1	Publication of a book of poems by Loiq Sherali, people's poet of Tajikistan	TBD	-
2	The 3 rd ECO Photo & Poster Festival	TBD	Online
3	Cooperation with the authorities of city of Sari, Iran on the occasion of declaration of Sari as the tourism capital of the ECO region in 2022	TBD	TBD
4	Basic Persian Speaking course in partnership with Saadi Foundation	October 2021	Online
5	A joint cultural event by the ECO member states participating in Expo 2022 Dubai to introduce common Nowruz festivities	March 2022	Dubai
6	First Meeting of Craft Artists of the ECO Region (Annex II)*	TBD	Online
7	ECI's Friendship Ambassadors program (Annex III)*	-	-
8	Afghan Film Week (Annex IV)	TBD	Tehran