

FPCCI Participation in Activities of ECO Chamber of Commerce and Industry

Executive Committee and General Assembly Meeting of ECO-CCI



ECO Chamber of Commerce and Industry organized its 28th Executive Committee and 18th General Assembly Meeting virtually by Zoom link. The meeting was addressed by Mr. Azarakhsh Hafizi, President ECO-CCI, Dr. Hadi Soleimanpur, Secretary General ECO Secretariat, Mr. Rifat Hisarciklioglu, President TOBB (Turkey), Mr. Gholam Hussein Shafeiee, Vice President ECO-CCI and President ICCIMA (Iran), Mian Anjum Nisar, President FPCCI, Jamshed Jumakhonzoda, President Chamber of Commerce and Industry of Tajikistan Representatives of Chambers of Commerce and Industry of Azerbaijan, Afghanistan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyz Republic, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan.



In his address, Mian Anjum Nisar, President FPCCI emphasized on the need of early implementation of ECOTA for the promotion of intra regional trade and investment among the ECO member countries. He also highlighted intra ECO tariff and non-tariff issues hampering the trade and investment opportunities in the region. He also called upon the ECO member countries for implementation of Transit Trade Agreement, TIR conventions, Agreement on Protection and Promotion of Investment, ECO Visa and White card scheme for development of border trade, sharing of knowledge and transfer of technology etc. He also highlighted the promotion of tourism prospects and development of transportation mechanism by road and rail among ECO countries. He invited the member countries to invest in CPEC related projects and utilize all natural resources of ECO for the sustainable prosperity of region.

In his remarks, President ECO-CCI Mr. Azarakhsh Haifizi underlined the need of developing unity, integration, harmonization of trade, movement of investment, business relations, facilitation of capital movement and exchange of business delegation among member countries for enhancing trade and other ties. He urged for barter and cross border trade relations among the countries.

While welcoming the delegates, Mr. Rifat Hisarciklioglu, President TOBB stated that trade has been a major driver of the economic development and private sector has always assumed leading role in boosting economic activities in national, regional and global economies. He urged for developing significant trade and investment ties, liberalization of movement of goods and services, technological transfers and development of mechanism for dispute resolution among ECO member countries. He stated that ECO countries possesses one third of world natural resources which need to be utilized for economic prosperity and joint ventures.



Dr. Hadi Soleimanpur, Secretary General ECO Secretariat also updated the participants about the measures taken at Government levels for the promotion of bilateral relations. He suggested for creation a task force at the ECO-CCI level for analyzing the trade opportunities, production gap, supply chain issues, trade facilitation etc.

Mr. Gholam Hussein Shafeiee, Vice President ECO-CCI and President ICCIMA underscored the need to increase cooperation in health, tourism, education, petro chemical, gas and energy sector. He also focused on the promotion of E-commerce and E-trade among member countries. He added that lack of bilateral Preferential Trade Agreements (PTA's) among the member states as well as non-implementation of the ECO Trade Agreement (ECOTA) are of the major reasons for the low intra ECO trade.

Mr. Amjad Rafi, Chairman National Committee of ECO-CCI (Pakistan Chapter) and Chairman Specialized Committee of Trade Facilitation also talked about real challenges of trade facilitation in order to minimize transaction costs and the resolving of complexity of international trade for businesses, without compromising efficient and effective levels of collection of customs revenues and other border controls. He Emphasized early implementation of ECO TRADE AGREEMENT

(ECOTA) which was signed in 2008 and issuance of VISA STICKERS to bonafide Businessmen for easy travel as in the case of SAARC.

During the meeting, the Presidency of ECO-CCI handed over to Iran Chamber of Commerce, Industry, Mines and Agriculture and Vice Presidency to Azerbaijan Chamber of Commerce and Industry. The participants also appreciated the services of outgoing President of ECO-CCI Mr. Azarakhsh Haifizi. Moreover, the Members Chambers expressed their solidarity with the peoples of Azerbaijan who losses their life in war with Armenia. The participants also discussed in detail the pandemic COVID-19 that has affected all the countries and created huge human and economic losses. ICCIMA also presented the proposal of manufacturing and promotion of ECO car.

The Representatives of other Member Chambers also discussed the intra-regional trade, E-Commerce, promotion of entrepreneurship, digitalization of economies, security, collaboration in science and technology, joint investment, SMEs promotion, SPS measures, trade cost, lack of bilateral agreement, exchange of knowledge, tariff rationalization, harmonization of visa regime, promotion of barter trade and opening of border gates, implementation of ECO trade transit agreement, implementation of ECO trade facilitation agreement, ECO trade fairs were discussed in detail. The reports of the Specialized Committee Meetings were also adopted and it was decided that the next Statutory and Specialized Committee Meetings of ECO-CCI will be held in Turkey.

Specialized Committee Meetings of ECO CCI

Prior to the Executive Committee and General Assembly Meetings, the Extra Ordinary Specialized Committees Meetings of ECO-CCI held via Video link as per the following schedule.

Committees/Council	Date	Represented by
Women Entrepreneur Council	June 16, 2020	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ms Nazli Abid, Member • Ms Shabana Asif, Women Entrepreneur • Ms Farah Sheikh, Women Entrepreneur • Ms Rabia Sheikh, Women Entrepreneur
Industry Investment & SME Promotion	June 29, 2020	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Shaikh Sultan Rehman Vice President FPCCI • Mr. Abrar Ahmed FPCCI Convener • Mr. Mubashir Butt, Member
Transportation	June 30, 2020	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Shaikh Sultan Rehman, Vice President FPCCI • Mr. Baber Iqbal, FPCCI Convener
Trade Facilitation	July 3, 2020	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Shaikh Sultan Rehman, Vice President FPCCI • Mr. Amjad Rafi, Chairman Specialized Committee of Trade Facilitation
Tourism	July 6, 2020	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Shaikh Sultan Rehman, Vice President FPCCI • Mr. Sohail Lashari, FPCCI Convener • Mr. Ismail Suttar Member

The National / Federation Chamber of all ECO Member countries also participated while active participation of Deputy Secretary General ECO Secretariat and the representative of ECO Trade and Development Bank were also witnessed in the meetings. All the representatives of ECO CCI member countries share their views and pledge to counter their efforts for the promotion of regional trade during the period of COVID-19.

It is worth mentioning here that FPCCI has Chairmanship of Specialized Committee on Trade Facilitation while the Chairmanship of other Specialized Committees is with Turkey and Iran. FPCCI point of view on the subject of the meeting was strongly presented by the Conveners (Pakistan Chapter) and Shaikh Sultan Rehman Vice President FPCCI which is given in respective headings.

Women Entrepreneur Council

The meeting of Women Entrepreneur Council of ECO-CCI was attended by the Women Entrepreneurs of all National Chambers of ECO Member Countries including Iran, Turkey, Pakistan, Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan, Kazakhstan, Azerbaijan, and Afghanistan. Besides, the representatives of ECO Secretariat and ECO Bank also present in the meeting which was chaired by Miss Moghemi Chairperson of the Council from Iran who inaugurated the meeting by her welcome address emphasizing the need of intensifying interactions amongst the women Entrepreneurs of the ECO region. Ms Shabana Asif-Sub Convener and SVP East women Chamber, Ms Farah Sheikh – EC member and Ms Rabia Sheikh - EC member also attended the meeting.



The Representative of FPCCI Ms. Nazli Abid spoke about the current situation and challenges being faced by SME and women entrepreneurs in the wake of COVID-19. She also informed the ECO representation of the incentives being given by the government of Pakistan. She also emphasized on the need of the business and digitalization. She also highlighted the services being provided by FPCCI in the current situation by establishing Help Desk facilitated the business community. She said the Economy of Pakistan cannot afford long lockdown hence the business activities are being carried out with proper SOPs. She suggested creating a portal encompassing the entrepreneurs globally. She also informed that FPCCI going to conduct Digital Fashion Show. She also spoke about the promotion of Hilal products. She also suggested that the delegations and Exhibitions should be incorporated amongst the ECO Member States for the promotion of women entrepreneurship all the representatives of ECO CCI member countries share their views and pledge to counter their efforts for the promotion of regional trade. FPCCI also apprised the delegates of the challenges being faced by the SME sector and women entrepreneurs in Pakistan in the wake of COVID-19.

Industry, Investment and SMEs Promotion

The Specialized Committee Meetings of Industry, Investment and SMEs Promotion of ECO-CCI was held via video link and attended by representatives of the Chambers of Commerce & Industry of member countries including Afghanistan, Iran, Turkey and Pakistan and ECO Trade and Development Bank. Mr. Sheikh Sultan Rehman, Vice President of the Federation of Pakistan Chambers of Commerce and Industry (FPCCI), Mr. Abrar Ahmed FPCCI Convener and Mubashir Butt Member of the Specialized Committee Industry, Investment and SMEs Promotion on FPCCI attended the meeting from Pakistan.



Sheikh Sultan Rehman, Vice President FPCCI stated that Industry is a real sector of the economy which has significant forward and backward linkages with the other sectors of economy.

Unfortunately COVID-19, significantly affected the economy of Pakistan in terms of declining economic growth, industrial production, exports, remittances, tax revenue collection, disruption in supply chain and decline in demand of non-essential items. He also shared the measures taken by Government of Pakistan and State Bank of Pakistan in facilitating industry and investment in Pakistan particularly in health sector by increased testing facilities, provision of Personal Protection Equipments and Life Saving medicines. He also informed about the international survey initiated by the FPCCI to analyze the impact of COVID-19 on trade and industry of different countries.

Mr. Abrar Ahmed, Convener of the Specialized Committee Industry, Investment and SMEs Promotion also discussed the measures taken by Pakistani Government like reduction in policy rate, deferment of loans and debts, soft loans to industries for payment of wages and salaries, concessionary loans to SMEs and the agriculture sector. He also emphasized on joint ventures between Pakistan and other countries in textile and other sectors.

During the meeting, the participants shared the experience of pandemic and measures taken by their government for facilitating the trade and industry and discussed in details ECO Investment conference, promotion of Halal Industry, harmonization of visa regime, problems related to SME, promotion of barter trade and opening of border gates, implementation of ECO trade transit agreement, holding of ECO trade facilitation agreement, ECO trade fairs.

Transportation

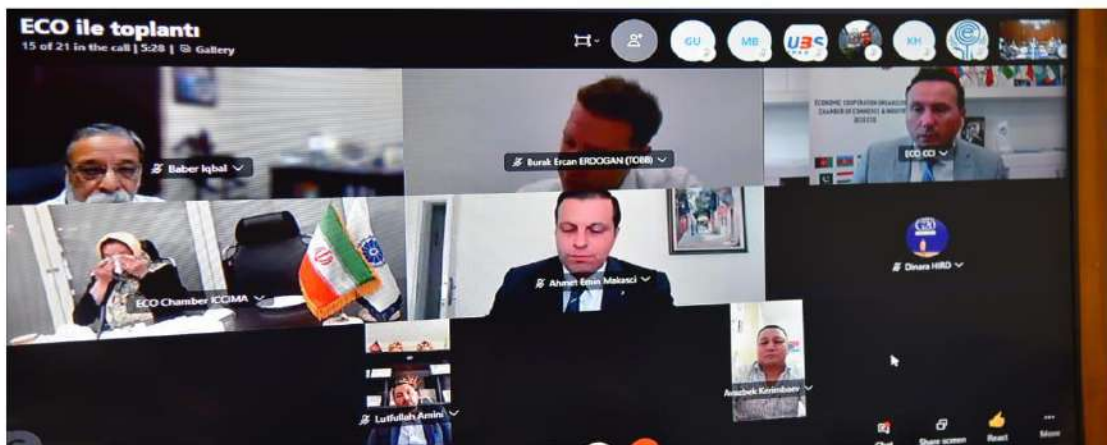
The Specialized Committee Meeting of Transportation of ECO Chamber of Commerce & Industry (ECO-CCI) was held via video link and attended by representatives of the Chambers of Commerce & Industry of member countries including Afghanistan, Azerbaijan, Iran, Kyrgyz Republic, Turkey, Uzbekistan and Pakistan and ECO Secretariat. Shaikh Sultan Rehman, Vice President of the Federation of Pakistan Chambers of Commerce and Industry (FPCCI), Baber Iqbal FPCCI Convener of the Specialized Committee on Transportation (Pakistan Chapter) attended the meeting from Pakistan.

Shaikh Sultan Rehman Vice President FPCCI stated the development of an efficient transport system in ECO region will lower the transportation costs and improve the competitiveness of member countries. He also emphasized on the operationalization of Islamabad Tehran Istanbul cargo train project, KTAI project by completing rehabilitation and construction of missing links of the existing railway routes. He urged the member countries to implement ECO- Transit Transport Framework Agreement (TTFA) which will reduce transportation cost and acceleration of the transport services through harmonization and modernization of transit transport, facilitation of movement of goods and passengers, ensuring the safety of goods and passengers and avoiding unnecessary delays during the transit traffic, avoidance of incidence of customs frauds, tax evasion and harmonizing necessary administrative affairs in the region.

Mr. Baber Iqbal, Convener of the Specialized Committee on Transportation also highlighted the issues faced by Pakistan during COVID-19 which affects the border and air cargo trade. He also discussed CPEC which will bring prosperity and development in the region by providing transit to

Central Asian countries through Pakistan to Middle East and Africa through shortest route and low cost of trade to the land locked member countries.

During the meeting, the participants shared the experience of pandemic and measures taken by their government for facilitating the transportation and discussed in details the issues of operationalizing of TIR convention which may help in reducing cost of transportation and increase competitiveness, ITI, KTAI train, cross border transport agreement, Afghan transit trade agreement, transit cargo were emphasized. Moreover, the participants suggested training session for traders and transporters on TIR by TOBB and sharing of Border gate experience by TOBB.



Trade Facilitation

The Specialized Committee Meeting of Trade Facilitation of ECO Chamber of Commerce & Industry (ECO-CCI) was held via video link and attended by representatives of the Chambers of Commerce & Industry of member countries including Afghanistan, Azerbaijan, Iran, Kyrgyz Republic, Turkey, Uzbekistan and Pakistan and ECO Secretariat. The meeting was presided over by Mr. Amjad Rafi, Chairman National Committee of ECO-CCI (Pakistan Chapter) and Chairman Specialized Committee of Trade Facilitation and Shaikh Sultan Rehman, Vice President of the Federation of Pakistan Chambers of Commerce and Industry (FPCCI) also attended the meeting from Pakistan.



While chairing the meeting, Mr. Amjad Rafi, Chairman stated that the real challenge of trade facilitation is to minimize transaction costs and the complexity of international trade for businesses, without compromising efficient and effective levels of collection of customs revenues and other border controls. He also highlighted the pandemic situation and measures taken by the Government to minimize the risk for trade and industry. He also discussed in details the issues related to regional cooperation, SPS measures, trade cost, ECO visa sticker scheme, lack of bilateral trade agreements, intra-ECO investment, exchange of knowledge, tariff rationalization, implementation of ECOTA, ECO Trade Fair, ECO exhibition, technological transformation, Joint ventures, promotion of barter trade and opening of border gates, implementation of ECO trade transit agreement etc.

Shaikh Sultan Rehman, Vice President FPCCI emphasized on promotion of intra regional trade and investment among the ECO countries. He highlighted intra ECO tariff and non-tariff related issues which increases cost of trade. He added that expanding of trade volumes require trade liberalization, harmonization of policies, reducing the cost of doing business, financial infrastructure, economic efficiency and institutional capacity building. He stressed on the implementation of ECOTA, Agreement on Protection & Promotion of Investment, ECO Trade Facilitation agreement, ECO Visa & White card scheme. He urged the member countries to move towards export of high value added, medium-to-high technology exports by upgrading and diversifying their industrial structure.

Dr. Syed Yahya Akhlaq, Deputy Secretary General ECO Secretariat also updated the status of implementation of ECOTA. He further informed that the agreement will come into force after approval in the next meeting ECOTA Cooperation Council likely to be held in August 2020 and ECOTA will be implemented either in the end of 2020 or early 2021.

The house also suggested the holding of training sessions and workshops regarding the imports/exports procedures among member countries. During the meeting, the participants shared the experience of pandemic and measures taken by their government for facilitating their trade and investment by their government.

Tourism

The Specialized Committee Meeting of Tourism of ECO Chamber of Commerce & Industry (ECO-CCI) was attended by representatives of the Chambers of Commerce & Industry of member countries including Afghanistan, Azerbaijan, Iran, Turkey, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, Pakistan and ECO Secretariat. The FPCCI was represented by Sohail Lashari, Convener and Ismail Suttar, Member ECO-CCI Specialized Committee on Tourism (Pakistan Chapter) and Shaikh Sultan Rehman, Vice President FPCCI.

Shaikh Sultan Rehman Vice President FPCCI emphasized on the need of the promotion of tourism among the member countries as ECO Region is one of the world's richest in terms of historical and cultural heritage and echoes memories of the ancient Silk Road. He stated that despite various activities and events on tourism, the ECO Region still lacks a comprehensive regional strategy for sustainable tourism development. He added that to utilize the great potential of the region, diversification and easement of tourism activities, availability of quality services and visibility of the region is a necessary requirement. He also highlighted the measures taken by Pakistani Government for the promotion of tourism and visit of the royal couple Prince William and Kate Middleton (UK), the maiden visit of the Buddhist Monks, and visit of thousands of Sikh pilgrims to Nankana Sahib Birthplace through Kartarpur Corridor on his 550th anniversary attracted the international media attention.



Sohail Lashari, Convener of the Specialized Committee on Tourism of ECO-CCI (Pakistan Chapter) informed the participants about the impact of COVID-19 on tourism industry which caused losses to US\$ 300 billion globally in terms of cancellation of hotel booking, closing of restaurants, disruption of air travel and others. COVID-19, not only suspended the international tourism, it also affected the domestic tourism. Ismail Suttar Member of Specialized Committee also shared the tourism prospects and hoped the tourism activities will be resumed after the pandemic over.

During the Specialized Committee meeting on Tourism, member countries emphasized on bilateral and trilateral cooperation of tourism, enhancing the connectivity, promotion of regional tourism prospects, harmonization of visa regime, holding of ECO Tourism Forum, Investment in tourism related projects, health tourism, religion tourism, holding of tourism exhibitions, sharing of tourism aspects etc.

Extra Ordinary Meeting of ECO-CCI

An Extra Ordinary Meeting of member states of ECO CCI was virtually held on 5th May 2020 to discuss the impact of COVID - 19 on economic activities of ECO CCI member states and its repercussions and the government measures of each country to combat the pandemic and revive the business activities were also discussed focusing on enhancing exports and survival of small & medium enterprises SMEs.

The meeting was attended by heads of ECO CCI member states namely Mr. Azaraksh Hafizi - President ECO CCI, Mr. Rifat Hisarcıklioğlu - President Union of Chambers and Commodity Exchanges of Turkey (TOBB), Mr. Dovletgeldi Rejepov - Chairman Turkmenistan CCI, Syed Hossein Salimi - Board Member ICCIMA along with representatives from Afghanistan, Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan. The meeting was also graced by Dr. Hadi Soleimanpour - Secretary General of ECO.

Mr. Rifat Hisarcıklioğlu President ToBB in his welcome remarks said that it is new world order the world connected virtually. The COVID-19 is a global with local solution that is isolation and social distancing. World economy is badly affected and slowdown. Oil prices also have its repercussion on economic growth. He further said that our region ECO is also less integrated. He informed that first case of coronavirus was reported in March 2020 since then government took precautionary measures and lockdown. Government also introduced relief measures for business sector and has deferred payment of taxes for three months.

Mr. Azaraksh Hafizi, President ECO CCI while participating stated that due to this virus economy of our region is badly damaged. The region will face severe crises in terms of economy and finance after the crises will over. All member states cooperate with each to support economic progress and particularly ensure food supply chain. Collective effort should be made to combat this crisis. He said that Afghanistan is an underdeveloped country and coronavirus impact will badly affect economy adversely.

Secretary General ECO Mr. Hadi Soleimanpour emphasized upon strengthen of the region to face future challenges. He said that various programs are on the agenda of the ECO such as ease in Visa issuance, stickers for goods carrier's drivers, movement of goods in the region, ECOTA etc. He also urged the ECO Trade and Development Bank to support SMEs of the region under this COVID-19. He also informed that ECO secretariat is also liaisoning with international donor organizations to support ECO member states. Representative of the ECO CCI members' states informed about the conditions in their respective countries and measures taken by their governments in term of fiscal, tax, employment loss etc.

Mr. Amjad Rafi informed that Government of Pakistan has taken immediate measures in terms of lockdown, improving health and quarantine facilities etc. In order to reduce the social and economic losses, the Government of Pakistan has taken number of steps such as Economic Relief package of Rs. 1.2 trillion, Ehsaas/ Kifalat program (Cash amount), State Bank of Pakistan has announced various schemes of loans on low/reduced mark-up, amnesty scheme for construction industry, Fiscal relief in terms of deferment of payments or extension in filing tax return, waif off different port related charges, waif off different provincial levies etc.



He also emphasized on collective effort of ECO CCI member states to curb the virus and promote the business activities. ECO CCI member establish strong E-commerce for trade and prepare a plan to identify available resources in member states and also find their need in the respective members and share medical expertise and available medical equipment, medicines, kits and clothing etc. He said that this is a serious time for the whole world and the ECO CCI family should fight this together. He appreciated that the Government of Pakistan is working tirelessly to support the business community while he also thanked the ECO CCI secretariat to schedule this meeting during this turmoil.