

PAKISTAN AND ECONOMIC COOPERATION ORGANIZATION (ECO): WITH REFERENCE TO THE POLITICAL ECONOMY

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Abstract

Economic Cooperation Organization (ECO) was established in 1985 by the combine efforts of Iran, Pakistan and turkey. It is an intergovernmental regional organization whose sole idea was to promote economic, cultural and technical cooperation. Pakistan along with Turkey and Iran is one of the three founding members of the ECO. Currently ECO has 10 members (Turkey, Iran, Pakistan, Kazakhstan, Azerbaijan, Turkmenistan, Afghanistan, Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan and Tajikistan). Due to geostrategic position and rich in energy resources, ECO could serve as an engine of world economic growth in future. The purpose of this analytical study is to explanatively evaluate the various dimensional cooperation and integration arrangements that took place in the ECO region. The work narrates the objectives, goals and interests of Pakistan in the region and at the same time analyses various economic and geo-strategic factors that have shaped Pakistan's policy towards ECO since 1991. The research problem behind this study is to identify the role of Pakistan in major socioeconomic achievements of ECO that affect the process of economic integration in the region.

Keywords: *Charter of ECO, RCD, Pakistan, Economic Integration, ECOTA*

Introduction

The world has turned into a “Global Village” mainly characterized by economic liberalization, privatization and globalization. In such a changing global scenario, the economic challenges have become a dynamic policy issue for both developed and developing nations equally. Presently, the economic collaboration, whether

international, regional or bilateral level has become vital for facing the socio-economic development. The incredible success of regional organization e.g. ASEAN and the European Union has motivated to other regions of the world to establish economic groups/ cooperation. The Economic Cooperation Organization (ECO) was emerged as an intergovernmental economic cooperation by treaty of Izmir (Turkey), to promote multi- dimensional regional collaboration with a view to forming conditions for sustained socio-economic progress of the ten member states. It is consist of ten Central and West Asian countries, Pakistan, Iran Turkey, Afghanistan, Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan Tajikistan Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan (www.ecosecretariat.org). With 440 million dynamic populations (2014), the region enjoys 6.3 % of total global population. The region occupies a vital geopolitical location, bordered by Russia, China, the Indian Ocean, the Persian Gulf and the Caspian basin. ECO has a vast potential for the strengthening of regional cooperation as it is based on the solid foundation of economic complementarities, common cultural heritage, geographical proximity and the absence of serious disputes and hegemonic designs among its members. These factors also provide the basis for a community of interests, that is, a common destiny and a shared vision of the future among the member states of ECO. Economic complementarities hold the promise of an enormous expansion of intra-regional trade and cooperation within the framework of ECO. Due to its geostrategic position, the ECO collectively and its member countries individually has a significant connection between this regional group to other regional and international economic groups. All of ten countries of the region are characterized by common religious, cultural historical and economic affinities. All ten nations are also members of organization of Islamic conference (OIC). The affinities of sentiment, among these nations are reflected in their working hand in hand in the OIC, United Nation and the Non Alignment Movement (NAM). Both Pakistan and Afghanistan ,As member of eight nation group South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) SAARC, are connected the ECO region to South Asian continent. Turkey, being as a member of, Organization for Security and Cooperation for Europe and North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), it linked two continents (Asia and Europe). Iran plays a vital role in significant international waterways. Other Six ECO's members belong to central Asian has strong historical economic relations with the Commonwealth Independence States(CIS) and former superpower Russian

federation former superpower former superpower . These external relations of ECO and its member states help its economic integration with the global market. The most strategic significance of this region lies in the fact that it contains the biggest reserve of oil natural gas and mineral resources. In 2011, the region contributed 2.7 percent of international economy (www.ecosecretariat.org). Due to geo-strategic position and rich in energy resources it has potential to serve as an engine of world economic growth in the future.

ECO Member states at a Glance

Countries	Population Million (2012-	Area (Km2)	GDP (PPP Billion \$ (2012-14)	Per Capita (PPP) \$	Capital	HDI Ranking For 2013
Afghanistan	31,822,848	652,864	\$36.838	\$1,177	Kabul	Low · 169th
Azerbaijan	9,494,600	86,600	\$102.811	\$11,04	Baku	High · 76th
Iran	77,176,930	1,648,195	\$1,284.0	\$16,46	Tehran	High · 75th
Kazakhstan	17,948,816	2,724,900	\$395.512	\$23,03	Astana	High · 70th
Kyrgyzstan	5,776,500	199,900	\$13.125	\$2,372	Bishkek	Medium · 125th
Pakistan	196,174,380	796,095	\$565	\$3,034	Islamabad	Low · 146th
Tajikistan	8,208,000	143,100	\$0.17	\$2,247	Dushanbe	Medium · 113th
Turkey	76,667,864	783,562	\$1,512.5	\$19,55	Ankara	High · 69th
Turkmenistan	5,171,943	488,100	\$82.151	\$14,17	Ashgabat	Medium · 103rd
Uzbekistan	30,185,000	447,400	\$61.720	\$2,017	Tashkent	Medium · 116th

ECO Statistical Report 2014

Historical context of Research Problem

The Regional Cooperation for Development (RCD) was established as a tripartite arrangement between Pakistan, Turkey and Iran in 1964. The aim of RCD was to strengthen their cooperation in the fields of socio-economic development, trade, transportation, communications, railway, industry, and banking among member states. These three nations were also the regional members of the Central Treaty

Organization (CENTO). However, a number of financial, political and administrative difficulties made progress slow. After twelve unsatisfactory years, the three regional Heads of State held a summit in Izmir (Turkey) in April 1976, making modifications to the RCD declaration. This development was disturbed due to the Iranian Islamic revolution in the late 70s and the reservation of the new government in Iran, the organization was dissolved in 1979. However, after a few years three countries realized the need for restoring close collaboration in the economic field, and decide to restructure and revived the organization by replacing the RCD with a new organization, Economic Cooperation Organization in 1985. The first meeting of its high council was held in Tehran, discussed the scope and function of organization, and setup four committees to promote cooperation in the socio economic field among member states (Mehmood Safder, 2000). After the disintegration of Soviet Union in December 1991, Central Asian and Caucasus Republics got independence. Due to their historical cultural and religious similarities with the people of Turkey, Pakistan and Iran, six newly independence nations of central Asian - Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan, applied for the membership of ECO along with Afghanistan. The formal accession application of these new members was accepted by official meeting at Islamabad in May 1992. This enlargement has open the new chapter in the history of ten member states organization ECO, signifying a huge area of natural resources and more than 440 million dynamic people (Önder Özar, 2002).

Overview of ECO's Charter

The revised Charter of ECO enforced in 1997. The charter set forth the principles, objectives and institutional arrangements of the organization. Originally, there are sixteen articles in the ECO Charter. The various protocol and the declarations have been adopted by the member states from time to time.(See Table below)

Consolidated Version Of ECO Charter 1992	
Preamble	
Article I	Definitions
Article II	Objectives
Article III	Principles Of Cooperation
Article IV	ECO Summit Of The Heads Of State Or Government
Article V	Organizational Structure Of ECO
Article VI	ECO Council Of Ministers

Article VII	Permanent Representatives Of Council
Article VIII	ECO Regional Planning Council
Article IX	Eco Secretariat
Article X	Regional Institutions/Agencies
Article XI	Financial Provisions
Article XII	Decision-Making
Article XIII	Membership
Article XIV	General Provisions
Article XV	Amendment
Article XVI	Final Provisions

The objective and Principles of ECO

The charter set forth the principles, objectives and institutional arrangements of the organization. Originally there are sixteen articles in the ECO Charter. The various protocol and the declarations have been adopted by the member states time to time. Under the article two and three of the Charter, the main objectives of the ECO are to:

- Sustainable economic development of Member States;
- Progressive removal of trade barriers and promotion of intra- regional trade; Greater role of ECO region in the growth of world trade; Gradual integration of the economies of the Member States with the world economy;
- Development of transport & communications infrastructure linking the Member States with each other and with the outside world;
- Economic liberalization and privatization;
- Mobilization and utilization of ECO region's material resources;
- Effective utilization of the agricultural and industrial potentials of ECO region;
- Regional cooperation for drug abuse control, ecological and environmental protection and strengthening of historical and cultural ties among the peoples of the ECO region; and
- Mutually beneficial cooperation with regional and international organizations (Article II of the ECO Charter).

Under the article three of the charter, the concept of regional cooperation in organization is based on the following principles:

- Sovereign equality of the Member States and mutual advantage;
- Linking of national economic, development plans with ECO's immediate and long-term objectives to the extent possible;
- Joint efforts to gain freer access to markets outside the ECO region for the raw materials and finished products of the Member States;
- Effective utilization of ECO institutions, agreements and cooperative arrangements with other regional and international organizations including multilateral financial institutions;
- Common endeavors to develop a harmonized approach for participation in regional and global arrangements;
- Realization of economic cooperation strategy; and Exchanges in educational, scientific, technical and cultural fields (Article III of the ECO Charter).

Institutional framework of ECO

The Charter provides the following institutions and bodies for implementing the policies of organization. Under the article four of the charter, the ECO Summit is a highest political and formal platform of member countries that undertake the activities for the welfare and benefit for more than 440 million people of the ECO region. The Summit brings together member states at the highest level (Heads of State or Government), along with Secretary General, and meet generally once after two year. Since its first Summit in Tehran (held on February 16-17), thirteen summits have been held so far. The Fourteen summits are scheduled to convene in Pakistan. The Council of Ministers is one of the chief legislative bodies of the in ECO institutional frame work, which is consisting of foreign ministers. The Council is responsible for articulating policies; reviewing development of the organization ;deciding the new sectors of collaboration; creating further mechanisms as deemed essential; and conclusive on other matters of general interest to the organization (Article VI of the ECO Charter). The Regional Planning Council (RPC) comprises senior planning officials or other representatives of member countries. It is responsible for reviewing programmes of

activity and evaluating results achieved, and for proposing future plans of action to the Council of ministers. The Secretariat is headed by a Secretary-General, who is appointed from member countries by the Council of Ministers in alphabetical order. He/she is appointed for a term of three years, although this may be increased in special circumstances. He/she is supported by two Deputy Secretaries-General (Europa Regional Survey of the World 2014). The Secretariat services regular ministerial meetings held by regional ministers responsible for agriculture; energy and minerals; finance and economy; industry; trade and investment; and transport and communications. ECO's secretariat is located in Tehran (Article X of the ECO Charter). Activities of ECO are conducted under secretary general and his deputies who consider and evolve programmes of mutual benefits in the field of:

- Transport and telecommunication.
- Trade and investment.
- Energy, minerals and environment.
- Agriculture industry and tourism.
- Human resources and sustainable development.
- Project and economic research and statistics.

The decision making procedures for organization, set out in the charter, is dominated by the intergovernmental method. Article twelve provided that all decisions would be based on unanimity, which, in effect meant that each member would have a veto. "Bilateral" and "Contentious" matters would not be discussed in the forum (Article X of the ECO Charter).

Evaluation of ECO's Achievements

ECO priorities and objectives for each sector are defined in the Quetta Plan of Action, the Istanbul Declaration, and 'Almaty Outline Plan', which was adopted in 1993, is specifically concerned with the development of regional transport and communication infrastructure (Turner Barry, 2013 p.69). Meeting in October 2006, the ECO Council of Ministers adopted a document entitled ECO Vision 2015 detailing basic policy guidelines for the organization's activities, during 2006-15, and setting a number of targets to be achieved in the various areas of

regional cooperation (Europa Regional Survey of the World 2014). Intra-regional trade refers to trade which focuses on economic exchange primarily between countries of the same region or economic zone. In recent years countries within economic-trade regimes such as Association South East Asian Nations (ASEAN) in Southeast Asia for example have increased the level of trade and commodity exchange between themselves which reduces the inflation and tariff barriers associated with foreign markets resulting in growing prosperity.

Trade and Investment Sector always remain on of the most vital priority for regional cooperation The strategy adopted by the member states of ECO in these areas is to gradually elimination of trade barriers, efforts for greater internal and international market access, transportation of goods, simplification and harmonization of the national customs procedures, extension of existing preferential tariff measures, adopt common approaches in regional and international agencies/ organizations , particularly the World Trade Organization (WTO), ASEAN , European Union and SAARC for progress of regional and global trade (ECO 1992-2002). In achieving of these objectives, the member of ECO has taken various measures in the Trade sector including ECO preferential trade arrangement in 1991, signed a Framework Agreement on ECO Cooperation (ECOFAT) in March 2000, the ECO Trade Agreement (ECOTA) in 2004. In 1991, member states of organization have lunched ECO preferential trade arrangement. The main objective of the agreement was to enlarge trade cooperation among member states through mutual exchange of concessions. The arrangement provide for a 10 percent import tariff reduction on listed goods (op.cit :280). Convening in conference in March 2000, ECO ministers of trade signed a Framework Agreement on ECO Cooperation (ECOFAT), which established a basis for the expansion of intra-regional trade. The Framework Agreement envisaged the eventual adoption of an accord providing for the gradual removal of regional trade obstacles like customs duties, and tariff among the member states.

Another trade agreement ECO Trade Agreement (ECOTA) was signed in the 2nd Ministerial meeting on Commerce / Foreign Trade at Islamabad in July 2003. The basic principle of ECOTA is to gradually elimination of non-tariff barriers as well as progressive removal of tariffs in the region. The ECOTA entered into force in April 2008, having been ratified by Afghanistan, Iran, Pakistan,

Tajikistan and Turkey so far. The agreement cover a period of 8 years and more than 80 percent of traded goods more than 15 percent were reduce tariffs (op.cit 2014). By this agreement a Free Trade Area will establish in the ECO region by 2015. Together with the Transit Transport Framework Agreement (TTFA), the ECOTA has a potential to form massive prospects for the economic wellbeing of the peoples (www.ecosecretariat.org).. However despite high hopes, the intra-regional trade with in ECO could not be profoundly enhanced and it has been around 5% though the member states receive preferential treatment. Intra-regional trade is promoted when the member states have comparative advantage in diverse products and exhibit strong trade complementarities. Pakistan's trade with in ECO accounts for only 3% of its total trade. The main hurdles in trade promotion with in ECO are:

- ECO members are characterized by an almost identical pattern of comparative advantage in a relatively narrow range of products and consequently they have weak complementarities in their bilateral trade structures. Trade complementarity may zero if no good exported by one country is imported by the other.
- ECO member states are deficient in capital. Their industrial base is hardly diversified resulting in lack of export diversification. The regional exports largely consist of raw materials and traditional products. Where they have comparative advantage there they are competitors in the world market rather than trading amongst themselves. Resultantly ECO trade is tilted towards developed countries.
- Lack of transport communication has greatly reduced the intra-regional trade because seven of the ten member states are landlocked. Pakistan trade with CARs is almost totally dependent on Afghanistan. Afghanistan also links all the member states of ECO and the continuous instability there has been worsely affecting trade within the Organization (Shabbir Ahmad Khan 2003).

A well-organized and modern transportation and communication system among the ECO member states is a significant factor for development of trade and socio-economic integration, Due to the geographical contiguity, as seven member states are landlocked, it is imperative for ECO member countries to develop a strong

of collaboration and monitoring in the Transport and Communications sector. Under the frame work of treaty of Izmir, the Quetta plan of action (1993) provide the main guide line for the development of transport infrastructure in the region. ECO has achieved a major development by signing a Transit Transport Framework Agreement (TTFA) and a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) to help combat the cross-border trafficking of illegal goods in May 1998 at the fifth summit meeting, held in Kazakhstan. The TTFA, entered into force in May 2006, aimed at gradually elimination of non-physical barriers in the region, like synchronization of processes, and accession by all member countries to universal transport conventions and moral norms (op.cit 2014). Developed infrastructures would connected all sections of the significant Silk Road again and creating a viable impetus for trade and increasing the region's access to South and East Asia. More than Four hundred and thirty million people covering a vast area of more than eight million km² would reconstruct their flourishing past in contemporary world (op.cit 2014). (ECO Decade of Progress).The region of ECO occupies a significant geo-strategic position bordered by Russia, China, the Indian Ocean, the Persian Gulf and the Caspian basin. The most strategic importance of this region lies in the fact that it contains the biggest reserve of oil natural gas and mineral resources. Since the beginning of 20th century Azerbaijan – one of the ECO member states- is /was leading natural oil producer. It was also birth place of petroleum refining industry. Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan -other central Asian countries- are also possessing huge reserve of oil, natural gas and coal. Iran is known to possess the world largest resources of natural gas and fourth largest producers of crude petroleum globally (Fisher .W.B, 2013 p.410). The Quetta plan of action (1993) provides the main guide line for ECO member states, to strengthen and operation of region's enormous natural assets. (ECO Decade of Progress) By developing the necessary infrastructure like gas and oil pipelines, power lines, the region can successfully meet its own energy requirements as well as international Cooperation with other regional and international organizations is one of the main objectives of the association, set by the charter. The ECO has continued its relation with various regional and international organizations The ECO gained observer status at the UNO, OIC and WTO since 1993 (op.cit, 69). In February 1993 ECO signed a memorandum of understanding with the *United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD)* whereby both parties agreed to exchange information on trade control

measures, in order to increase transparency and thereby facilitate trade. In February 1994, ECO signed a framework cooperation agreement with the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (*ESCAP*) to enhance development cooperation through a framework of combined studies, workshop and exchange of information. Organization has also signed cooperation agreements with The United Nations Children's Fund – *UNICEF* (in 1993), the Asia Pacific Tele-community (1994), UN Drug Programme (1995), the International Telecommunication Union (1997), the Canadian International Development Agency (1997), WHO (2000), and *UNIFEM*, the United Nations Development Fund for Women (2001). An informal dialogue at ministerial level has been conducted with the EU, ASEAN and SAARC since 1993, which bears testimony to its growing popularity (op.cit, 280). ECO and - World Intellectual Property Organization hold regular consultations and convened conferences and seminars concerning regional cooperation on intellectual property rights. During 2004 memorandums of understanding were signed with the Joint UN Programme on HIV/AIDS and with the UN Population Fund (UNIFPA) (op.cit 2014).

The ECO has also acquired observer status with the OIC which permitted it to take benefit from OIC's economic development programmes envisioned and developed through its related bodies. The ECO is already receiving significant support from the Islamic Development Bank in carrying out some of its activities. In March 2011, ECO the UN Economic Commission for Europe and the Islamic development Bank signed a trilateral MOU on cooperation (Ibid 2014). In 2007, ECO and the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) signed an MOU on mutual cooperation in the areas including trade and transportation, energy and environment, and tourism. In November 2001 the UN Secretary-General requested ECO to take an active role in efforts to restore stability in Afghanistan and to co-operate closely with his special representative in that country. In June 2002, the ECO Secretary-General participated in a tripartite ministerial conference on cooperation for development in Afghanistan that was convened under the auspices of the UN Development Programme; and attended by representatives from Afghanistan, Iran and Pakistan. ECO operates a Special Fund for the Reconstruction of Afghanistan, which was established in April 2004; by 2013 more than US \$11m had been pledged to the Fund. By that time the Fund had approved four ECO projects targeted towards the education and health

sectors. ECO envisages connecting Afghanistan to the regional rail road system (op.cit 69).

Pakistan and Economic Cooperation Organization (ECO)

Pakistan along with Turkey and Iran is one of the three founding members of the Economic Cooperation Organization (ECO). ECO is generally summarized as a commercial and trade oriented organization, provides a platform that brings Pakistan and the Central and South Asian States together. Considering such goals and holding an important member position of this organization Pakistan can and is performing much important work. Its regional specific role can be said to have begun when it became a member of SEATO, CENTO and RCD. And like other regional organizations of the world it has vehemently strived to achieve the success in the mutually agreed areas of cooperation. Pakistan is situated at such a geographical location that it has significant role to do regarding the betterment of ECO. Both Pakistan and Afghanistan ,as member of eight nation group South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) SAARC, are connected the ECO region to South Asian continent. Out of ten member states, seven are landlocked; Pakistan is the only country that provides a natural route to sea for 6 of these countries. ECO is striving for alleviating poverty, improving agricultural and industrial potential along with environmental control and drug control and many more. Being holding an important strategic position Pakistan in this region of rich resources is also striving for the betterment of this organization by formally participating in the growth of the sectors ECO is strived for. Pakistan has been playing a contributory role in the institutionalization of ECO. Pakistan geographical location makes it both at the crossroads of interaction for very different regions around the Asia and the very heart of intra-regional linkages. It is getting new international importance and stature through its outward-looking approach (Pakistan Observer December 22, 2010).

Conclusion

The establishment of ECO is a significant development in process regional cooperation and a recent phenomenon in comparison to many other regions of the world. The ECO is an intergovernmental organization consists of three Asia countries and seven Eurasian nations. The common objective is to create a free trade area /single market for goods and services, much like to the EU and ASEAN

till 2015. The ECO has completed 28 years of existence, during these years organization has “widened” as well as “deepened”. As a widened aspect, it has enlarged its membership from three nation (1985) to ten countries so far. Since 1993 it has gained observer status in three organizations. Turkish Republic of North Cyprus has been attending its summits as observer since 1995. It has also increased its activities and institutional set-up as deepened aspect. The degree of integration depends upon the willingness and commitment of independent sovereign states to share their sovereignty. Deep integration that focuses on regulating the business environment in a more general sense is faced with many difficulties. The organization has marvelous potential for mutual advantage of the member countries of the region. Due to geostrategic position, its global stature and power is growing. However, the ECO faces multi-dimensional challenges. Most prominently, poor infrastructure of the member states in the field of Transportation and communications and institutions which the ECO is mainly pursuing to develop, to make full use of the accessible resources in the region and provide sustainable socioeconomic progress for the member countries. Despite the fact that the region is rich in energy resources, member states are financially constrained to start the development projects. To meet the challenges of it is imperative for each member state to increase its exports to other countries of the region. It would ensure not only enhance the intra-regional trade but also prove a source for motivating the sustainable socioeconomic development and activities in the region. Moreover, unless above mentioned challenges and constraints, faced by member states, are not settled, ECO cannot make any substantial contribution in improving cross-border connectivity, boosting trade among member countries, and strengthening regional economic cooperation process of the region.

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