

ISTANBUL FORUM FOR ECONOMIC COOPERATION
BETWEEN
TURKEY, AFGHANISTAN AND PAKISTAN

Joint Declaration for the Seventh Meeting

December 12, 2012 – Ankara

1. Istanbul Forum for Economic Cooperation between Afghanistan, Turkey and Pakistan is a tripartite dialogue mechanism established on October 26, 2007 between the Union of Chambers and Commodity Exchanges of Turkey (TOBB), Afghanistan Chambers of Commerce and Industries (ACCI) and the Federation of Pakistan Chambers of Commerce and Industry (FPCCI) to promote the contribution of the business world to the stability building process in the region.

Transport connectivity

2. The potential for Economic integration among Afghanistan, Turkey and Pakistan has not yet been fully tapped despite the high complementarity of the economic structures and efforts of entrepreneurs of three countries. A major reason for this is weak logistics connections. Currently the main connection between Turkey and Pakistan is through maritime liners, which takes a long time. For Afghanistan, all logistic operations are done by trucks, except a limited railway connection in the North. Turkey's railway connection to the East is weak as a result of the time spent during the Van Lake passing. The Forum members believe that strengthening logistics connectivity between the three countries and further to Eurasia will bring a strong impetus to the integration between three countries and their economic performance.

3. Forum members appreciated the efforts made by the Union of Chambers and Commodity Exchanges of Turkey to ensure efficient and safe operation of the container train service between Istanbul–Islamabad. Container train service on the Istanbul–Islamabad corridor provides a fast, reliable and low-cost logistics alternative that has a potential to boost the regional integration. BALO, a company established by the Turkish chamber system, is undertaking feasibility process for strengthening coordination and initiating further investments for this Train. The initiative is also supported by Economic Cooperation Organization (ECO) and ECO CCI.

4. Istanbul Forum welcomes the opportunity to extend this corridor to Afghanistan. This extension will require multimodal logistics through the extended corridor. The cargo will be carried from Turkey until Quetta with train and then using trucks to Afghanistan through Chaman, and until Islamabad with train and then using trucks to Afghanistan through Torkham, and vice-versa. The forum members encourage three governments to look into ways for inclusion of these routes to the relevant transit trade agreements.

5. Forum members endorse further construction and rehabilitation of railways on these corridors in three countries. Specifically, they call for the national railway companies and governments to give priority to

- Investment for regular service of train ferries and construction of appropriate port facilities at the Van Lake passing in Turkey,
- Rehabilitation of the railway infrastructure, in particular improvement of the rolling stock, between Taftan and Quetta in Pakistan,
- Preparation of feasibility studies and construction of railway connections in the south of Afghanistan

Forum members invite international donors, financial institutions and private funds to look into financing opportunities for these infrastructure projects.

People to people connectivity

6. Forum members believe that people to people connections are of great importance for fostering connectivity and integration between Afghanistan, Turkey and Pakistan. One critical area of people to people exchanges is between entrepreneurs. Fostering long-lasting mentoring, investment and supplier relations between entrepreneurs of three countries is a priority of the Istanbul Forum.

7. In this regard, the 6th Istanbul Forum on November 1-2, 2011 in Istanbul with the theme of women entrepreneurship has been a great success. At the meeting, women entrepreneurs identified key bottlenecks in increasing their entrepreneurial activities, as well as sharing their experiences in overcoming these bottlenecks. Convention of women entrepreneurs in such meetings allow women to connect with private sector stakeholders in different countries, expand their network and develop policy recommendations for improving conditions of doing business. Additionally, such meetings will bring forward more women entrepreneurs as role models in the three countries. Therefore, women entrepreneurs are aimed to be brought together in similar entrepreneurship workshops.

8. Forum members also acknowledge these recent initiatives on fostering connectivity between entrepreneurs of Afghanistan, Turkey or Pakistan:

- Turkey – Pakistan Entrepreneurs Forum at the Second Global Summit on Entrepreneurship in Istanbul on December 4th, 2011.
- “Workshop on the Future of Women Entrepreneurship in the ECO Region” to be hold at the sidelines of the upcoming ECO CCI meetings in 2013.

9. Forum members encourage organization of further initiatives to increase connections between entrepreneurs of three countries. In this regard,

- Members encourage organization of Entrepreneurship Delegations of select role-model entrepreneurs between countries. In these organizations, members encourage TOBB to utilize its experience in organization of such high profile visits that include presentations by local start-ups, speed-mentoring sessions for nascent entrepreneurs, and meetings with the leaders of the local entrepreneurship eco-system.
- Members encourage piloting incubation centers in three countries. TOBB has started an incubation center at the premises of TOBB University of Economics and Technology in Ankara, where entrepreneurs are provided with office space and utilities, entrepreneur services such as legal and accountant support, as well as access to a large national and international mentor and investor network. Members encourage TOBB to start similar incubation centers in Afghanistan and Pakistan with local partners in order to contribute triggering local entrepreneurship communities, and support the connections between entrepreneurs of three countries.

10. The Istanbul Forum decided to have its eighth meeting in the second half of 2013 in the auspices of the trilateral summit.