

REPORT OF THE V. SESSION OF THE COUNCIL OF MINISTERS

(24 February 2001 in Cairo)

1. The Fifth Session of the Council of Ministers took place on 24 February 2001 in Cairo.
2. At the Inaugural Session, H.E. the Foreign Minister of Bangladesh, the current Chairman, having inaugurated the Fifth Session of the Council made an evaluation of the activities of the D-8 Grouping during the Chairmanship of his country. He underlined that the D-8 has made a steady and considerable progress since its inception. The Foreign Minister of Bangladesh then handed over the Chairmanship to H.E. the Foreign Minister of the Arab Republic of Egypt.
3. The Egyptian Foreign Minister referring to the fact that the existing international system is currently passing through fundamental changes bringing with it additional challenges to the D-8, stressed that these challenges require doubling our efforts to ensure effective participation in shaping the new global architecture for more equitable sharing of benefits and proportionate distribution of burdens between the different parties. He pointed out that the D-8 Group was established on a practical philosophy that attempts to further the common interests of its member states through an action-oriented approach. The D-8 constitutes a pioneering example in this respect. So far, we have taken several steps in various fields. We have also planned to take additional steps which have to be translated into concrete action. A balance should be stricken between action and ideas.
4. H. E. the President of the Islamic Development Bank and the Assistant Secretary General of the Organization of the Islamic Conference also addressed the Inaugural Session. The Chairman of the Egyptian General Federation of Commerce presented the recommendations of the First Meeting of the D-8 Forum for Chambers of Commerce, Industry and Business Associations in his address to the Council of Ministers.
5. At the Working Session of the Council, the Draft Provisional Agenda was approved. The D-8 Executive Director in his brief statement evaluated the D-8 activities since the creation of the Grouping and emphasized the importance of closely following up the implementation of the projects and decisions.
6. The Chairman of the Commission gave an account of the discussions which took place at the Tenth Session of the Commission and of the conclusions reached. In addition, the Chairman highlighted the joint meeting held between the Commissioners and the businessmen participating in the First Forum of the D-8 Chambers of Commerce and Industry and Business Associations. She commended the open and free discussion that took place between them as well as the appreciation expressed by the Commissioners for the dedication and interest that marked the First D-8 Business Forum meeting.

7. The Honorable Foreign Ministers and Heads of Delegations appreciated the work of the Commission and its Chairman as well as the efforts of the Executive Director and his staff.

8. The Foreign Ministers renewed the commitment of their governments to further D-8 cooperation. In this context, H.E. the Foreign Minister of Nigeria explaining the domestic difficulties experienced by his country in recent years stated that this had created some ambivalence in the position of Nigeria vis-a-vis D-8 cooperation. He however assured that his Government, having now overcome these difficulties to a great extent and achieved domestic stability, was ready to fully participate in D-8 cooperation. All the Ministers welcomed this development.

9. The Foreign Ministers while evaluating the activities of the Grouping elaborated on the subjects of cooperation for which their countries were acting as coordinator. In their assessment, they particularly underlined the following points.

- The participation of the private sector in D-8 cooperation is extremely important since it is the private sector which serves as the locomotive of the D-8 economies. Therefore, the creation of the Business Forum of the Federation of Chambers of Commerce and Industry and Business Associations constitute an important step in this direction. The Government of the Arab Republic of Egypt is to be congratulated for convening the First Meeting of the Business Forum.
- There should be an interaction between the D-8 Governments and the private sectors. The Governments should create suitable legal environment for the private sector. In this context, the conclusion of Agreements on “Avoidance of Double Taxation” as well as the “Promotion/ Protection of Investments”, harmonization of banking procedures, opening credit lines, reduction of tariffs and removal of trade barriers etc were mentioned. H. E. the Foreign Minister of the Islamic Republic of Iran proposed that the Expert Group Meeting on Trade should study the reduction of tariffs and removal of tariff barriers in a regional framework, taking into account the WTO commitments. He suggested that this subject should be reflected in the Cairo Declaration.
- Trade represents a major area of cooperation with large potentials. The setting up of the IMTC will be instrumental to this end. The IMTC should be private sector driven. It is earnestly hoped that the company would soon become operational after the examination of the revised version of the feasibility study to be prepared in the light of the views expressed in the Expert Group on Trade and the Commission. The governments should encourage the participation of the private sector in this important project.
- Development of information and communication technologies between the member countries and their access to important ICT centers are crucial to further D-8 cooperation. The ITDB network offers an important instrument to this end. The governments should consider providing incentives for the creation of multi-media super corridors and connecting their existing infrastructure in this context.

- The D-8 countries like many developing countries are facing serious problem of poverty which is one of the priority areas in D-8 cooperation. Therefore, there is a need to develop poverty alleviation programmes. For this purpose, new strategies have to be formulated and cooperation be intensified between the member countries.
- Capacity building must be incorporated in all D-8 projects. This has human, institutional and legal dimensions.
- The agricultural aircraft project represents an important subject of D-8 cooperation in the field of industry. Therefore, the possibility of serial production of the aircraft should be considered taking into account its commercial feasibility, based upon the quantitative requirements of the member countries and their likely contribution to the financing of the project.
- Since D-8 economies are not comparable to those of the industrialized world, the development of small and medium sized enterprises should have an important place in D-8 cooperation. Collaboration and exchange of experience in this field should be encouraged between the member countries.
- Environment is another subject which requires attention of the Grouping. The members should continue the cooperation already started in this field.

10. The Council recommended the Draft Cairo Declaration to the Third Summit for its approval with a minor amendment .

11. The Foreign Ministers and the Heads of the Delegations congratulated the Government of the Arab Republic of Egypt for the excellent arrangements for the Cairo Summit and expressed their profound thanks for its warm hospitality.

12. At the conclusion of the meeting, the “Agreement on Simplification of Visa Procedures for the Businessmen of the D-8 Member States” was signed by the People’s Republic of Bangladesh, the Arab Republic of Egypt, Indonesia, the Islamic Republic of Iran, the Federal Republic of Nigeria, the Islamic Republic of Pakistan and the Republic of Turkey.