THE SEVENTH REGIONAL ECONOMIC COOPERATION CONFERENCE ON AFGHANISTAN

CONFERENCE REPORT

14-15 NOVEMBER 2017
ASHGABAT, TURKMENISTAN
The Seventh Regional Economic Cooperation Conference on Afghanistan (RECCA-VII) was convened under the theme “Deepening Connectivity and Expanding Trade through Investment in Infrastructure and Improving Synergy” in Ashgabat, Turkmenistan on 14-15 November 2017.

Co-chaired by the Ministers of Foreign Affairs of Turkmenistan and the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan, the Conference brought together high-level delegations and senior representatives from 67 countries and organizations. The first day of RECCA-VII on November 14, included a number of important events including a Special Event on Women’s Entrepreneurship held in collaboration with the Office of H.E. the First Lady of Afghanistan, the Afghan Women Chamber of Commerce and Industries, the Chamber of Commerce and Industry of Turkmenistan, and USAID. The Special Event included two panel discussions on market access: success stories, and challenges and impediments to market access respectively with participants from Afghanistan, Turkmenistan and regional countries including women entrepreneurs participated in the activities of the first day.

The second day began with the Ministerial Session. His Excellency Rashid Meredov, Deputy Chairman of the Cabinet of Ministers and Minister of Foreign Affairs of Turkmenistan, His Excellency Sarwar Danish, Second Vice President of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan, and His Excellency Salahuddin Rabbani, Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan addressed the inauguration session. The Ministerial Session continued with a series of statements from the various participating governments and regional and international organizations.

RECCA-VII program on the first day also included an exhibition of goods from Afghanistan, Turkmenistan and regional countries as well as a business matchmaking event. More than 250 private sector representatives from Afghanistan, Turkmenistan and regional countries including women entrepreneurs participated in the activities of the first day.

The RECCA-VII program on November 15 included a special signing ceremony for the Lapis Lazuli Route Agreement, which marked an important milestone in the collective efforts under RECCA towards deepening connectivity and expanding trade.

The closing session of RECCA VII included presentations on the outcomes of the WGMs, Business Forum, Special Event, and the Academic Forum as well as the adoption of declaration. A number of offers expressed by regional countries to host the next meeting of RECCA.

Prior to the Ashgabat Meeting, six meetings of RECCA occurred since its inception: Kabul (2005), New Delhi (2006) Islamabad (2009), Istanbul (2010), Dushanbe (2012) and again in Kabul (2015). At RECCA-VI, Afghanistan and its regional partners began a sustained effort to incorporate the private sector into building the trade/transit/investment corridors of Central and South Asia on to Europe, Asia, and the Middle East. Via putting in place the ‘software’ components like enabling PPP legislation and emphasizing the ‘bankability’ of RECCA’s infrastructure projects, Afghanistan and its neighbors are beginning to realize investment from the private sector.

RECCA is now a principal platform for the economic integration of Central, South, and Southwest Asia, which is proceeding with full regional and extra regional support for the RECCA 2.0 agenda—including everything from joint bankable projects on one hand, to several new initiatives on the other including a RECCA Chamber of Commerce and Industry (RCCI), a Center for Research and Evaluation (CRE), investment road shows for bankable projects, and ultimately a regional economic strategy.
The Joint Opening of the "Business Forum" and the "Special Event on Empowering Women Entrepreneurs towards Access to Regional and Global Markets"

On November 14th, a joint official opening of the Business Forum and the Special Event on Empowering Women Entrepreneurs inaugurated by the First Lady of Afghanistan, H.E. Rula Ghani; H.E. Orazmyrat Gurbannazarov, Deputy Chairman of the Cabinet of Ministers of Turkmenistan; H.E. Orazmuradov D., Minister of Trade and Foreign Economic Relations of Turkmenistan; H.E. Humayoon Rasaw, Minister of Commerce and Industries of I.R. of Afghanistan and Heads of Chambers of Commerce of Turkmenistan & Afghanistan.

H.E. the First Lady in her opening remarks spoke about the historic role of merchants in the region in moving not just goods but ideas and practices that our shared culture and similarities are built upon. She stressed the need for the inclusion of women in the economic activities and expressed that “an economy that disregards half its population, is willingly cutting its own development by half”. She expressed optimism over the gradual increase in women's economic participation in Afghanistan while highlighting the “need for institutional support to their sustainable and meaningful contribution”.

The Special Event on Empowering Women Entrepreneurs was organized jointly by the RECCA secretariat, MoFA; the Office of H.E. the First Lady; the Afghanistan Women Chamber of Commerce and Industries (AWCCI), and the Chamber of Commerce and Industries of Turkmenistan, and USAID. There were two panel discussions at the special event. The first panel focused on Market Access - Success Stories and the second panel focused on Market Access Requirements and Challenges.

SPECIAL EVENT — PANEL 1
ACCESS TO MARKETS: SUCCESS STORIES

The first panel comprised success stories of the panelists accessing markets and the work that their respective organizations have done to increase women entrepreneurs’ access to markets. The important points raised in the first panel included the following:

- Government policies need to create an enabling environment for investment and for women's entrepreneurship such as providing easy loans with low interest rate can be of high help.
- A venture can become successful and can compete in both local and international markets if the commodities produced include raw materials and expertise available in one’s country.
- For a woman to gain access to markets, exposure visits and well-planned exhibitions and trade shows are important.
- Women are trustworthy in offering genuine products and so they should use their credibility accessing buyers.
- The opportunity is promising for Afghanistan’s precious stones and jewelry if access to finance is enhanced and improved infrastructure such as improved mining and laboratories for precious and gemstones are made available in Afghanistan.

The speakers on the first panel were:
- Chayaa Nanjappa Agrawal, Managing Director of Nectar Fresh, India
- Shaikha Noora Al-Khalifa, President of Medpoint, Bahrain
- Aybolek Pollyyeva and Aykamar Malikgulyyeva Board members of Turkmenistan Union of Industrialists and Entrepreneurs, Turkmenistan
- Nahid Hamidi, President of Shagirf Precious Stones, Afghanistan
- Manizha Wafeq, President of AWCCI, Afghanistan (Moderator of the Panel)
agricultural products.

- Another major challenge to women's businesses is the quality of their products and lack of awareness among women business owners about quality and standards.
- The challenge of rural women was discussed and it was emphasized that rural women need to be connected to the urban areas.

POLICY OPTIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Build export infrastructure and institutional capacity in order to improve access of women to markets within and outside Afghanistan. The export infrastructure and institutional capacity should include quality and standardization guidelines and support, internationally accepted coding for commodities, transportation, e-payment platforms, and improved post offices.
2. Implement women friendly policies such as the Women's Economic Empowerment National Priority Program
3. Improve women's access to finance.
4. Enhance regional networking opportunities for women and mainstream women into all other platforms. Governments and international partners can help women's chambers and business associations to plan outcome and output oriented networking events.
5. Gain men's support to women's businesses by involving them as mentors, coaches, business partners, buyers or suppliers to women-owned businesses.
6. Create long-term mentorship and coaching opportunities for Afghan women entrepreneurs. Through international partners programs in Afghanistan and in the region a model program can be replicated.
7. Create women to women business opportunities and connect rural with provincial women-owned businesses. The AWCCI has started this process but the initiative needs to be enhanced and supported by both the government of Afghanistan and other stakeholders in the private sector.
8. Simplify visa processes for business owners in the region through multilateral agreements among countries in the region.

CONCLUSION

Without political will, adequate infrastructure, a high-caliber legal environment, and proper policies in place for women's participation—and equally important without implementation of these policies—the region cannot achieve real women's participation and real women's economic empowerment. Enhancing planned interaction and networks of women in the region can be of great help for women to learn and use each other's hands-on experience. Efforts are necessary to pair up women business owners with each other to enhance experience sharing and hands on learning. Women business owners need to connect not only with the private sector but also with governments. The Government of Afghanistan needs to achieve best policy practices and business models from the neighboring countries such as providing women with lower interest rate loans and less stringent collateral loan conditions, as well as establishing capacity to support women business export efforts within and outside the country.
The Joint Opening of...

The RECCA VII Business Forum this year included a joint exhibition of goods from Afghanistan, Turkmenistan and the region. Over 50 exhibitors including 15 women exhibitors participated from Afghanistan, Turkmenistan and regional countries showcasing a wide range of products.

H.E. Homayoun Rasaw, Minister of Commerce and Industries of Afghanistan and Head of the Chamber of Commerce and Industries of Turkmenistan addressed the opening ceremony of the Exhibition in the presence of H.E. the First Lady of Afghanistan, high level officials from Afghanistan and Turkmenistan, as well as members of the diplomatic community in Ashgabat.

A business matchmaking event was also convened on November 14 bringing together businesses from Afghanistan and Turkmenistan.

RECCA VII Program on the first day also included a number of music performances by a 12-member music group from the Afghanistan National Institute of Music (ANIM) including in the joint opening of the Business Forum and Special Event as well as in the opening of the Exhibition.

H.E. Nazari in her closing remarks, stated that after the fall of the Taliban’s Regime, Afghan women have gradually achieved greater freedom and a series of achievements have paved the way to playing a more important role in society, including in the economic development of Afghanistan.

She expressed that this event was an important step and opportunity to learn from successful experiences and identify challenges and ways to address them and more importantly an opportunity to showcase Afghan women’s products and find markets for them. However, several factors such as insecurity, illiteracy, lack of expertise and skills, lack of access to financial resources and technology are among the challenges identified during the event. She highlighted that market access remains a vital factor for the growth of women-owned businesses.

She suggested that special regional markets should be established for women along with regional exhibitions in different countries for showcasing their products.
Improving Synergy” and stated that the theme reflects that our collective efforts need to be intensified towards addressing the common gaps, including infrastructure deficit and investment needs. Deputy Minister Raz also spoke about the RECCA Annual Review 2017 and said that “this year’s review highlights key challenges and implementation bottlenecks as well.

As part of the biannual ministerial meetings of the RECCA, three Working Group Meetings (WGMs) were held on the first day of the Conference centered on three important areas: i) energy and natural resources; ii) regional connectivity, and iii) regional trade, private sector development, business-to-business cooperation, and labor support. The Working Group Meetings were opened with remarks by H.E. Vepa Hajiyev, Deputy Foreign Minister of Turkmenistan and H.E. Adela Raz, Deputy Foreign Minister for Economic Cooperation of Afghanistan.

Deputy Minister Raz, among other issues, highlighted the importance of the theme of this year’s RECCA: “Deepening Connectivity and Expanding Trade through Investment in Infrastructure and Improving Synergy” and stated that the theme reflects that our collective efforts need to be intensified towards addressing the common gaps, including infrastructure deficit and investment needs. Deputy Minister Raz also spoke about the RECCA Annual Review 2017 and said that “this year’s review highlights key challenges and implementation bottlenecks as well.

The salient points raised in the first WGM included the following:

- As demand for electricity is increasing, Afghanistan is no longer a bottleneck.
- Central Asia is in possession of significant energy resource endowments, whereas South Asia possesses a large and growing population, creating ideal complementarity for increased energy connectivity between them, with Afghanistan situated in the middle of these two key regions.

Co-Chairs:
- H.E. Ajmal Ahmady, Senior Advisor to the President and TAPI Project Board Director, Afghanistan
- Mr. Muhammetmyrat Amanov, CEO of TAPI Pipeline Company Limited (TPCL)

Speakers:
- H.E. Amanullah Ghalib, CEO, Da Afghanistan Breshna Sherkat
- Mr. V. Rahmanov, Director of the Turkmenenergotaslama Research Institute, Ministry of Energy
- H.E. Samuel Tumiwa, ADB Country Director for Afghanistan
- Mr. Vishwesh Negi, Director of PIA, Ministry of External Affairs, India
- Mr. Shahbaz Hussain, Deputy Head of Mission, Embassy of Pakistan, Kabul

as the investment needs with regard to the priority projects.” She expressed hope that the deliberations in the three working group meetings would help us further identify the challenges as well as the cooperation opportunities that exist in our wider region.
First Working Group

- TAPI in particular is moving steadily toward the Implementation Phase of the project, which has included a series of conferences in Afghan provinces which have helped win local and public support for the project.

- While CASA will supply electrical power to northern Pakistan, TAP will supply it to southern Pakistan.

- ADB has focused intently on electricity transmission projects, with TUTAP being about getting electricity to Afghanistan and CASA 1000 being about using Afghanistan as a transmitter of power to elsewhere in the region.

- The challenge is to integrate TUTAP and CASA, which is the principal role of the TAP project – TAP will be a major source of Afghanistan’s energy supply.

- Afghanistan is an important energy transit corridor, and India has been helping in recent years with increasing the energy supply to it and through it; natural gas is set to become a critical part of India’s energy future.

- Pakistan fully subscribes to the Afghan regional economic integration strategy, which is in sync with Pakistan’s national policy.

SECOND WORKING GROUP MEETING
REGIONAL CONNECTIVITY

Co-Chairs:
- H.E. Mohammad Ismail Rahimi, Deputy Minister of Economy, Afghanistan
- H.E. A. Kosayev, Deputy Minister of Automobile Transport, Turkmenistan

Speakers:
- H.E. Mohammad Yama Shams, Director General, Afghanistan Railway Authority
- Mr. N. Orazov, Logistic Director, Ministry of Railway of Turkmenistan
- Dr. Najib Azizi, Board Chairman, Afghanistan Telecom Regulatory Authority
- H.E. Mr. Sun Weidong, Ambassador of the People’s Republic of China to Turkmenistan
- Mr. Amin Farjad, Deputy of Afghanistan Affairs Department, Islamic Republic of Iran
- Dr. Maihan Saeedi, Director, South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC).

The salient points raised in the second WGM included the following:

- Turkmenistan is situated at the crossroads of the main regional transport corridors.

- The contracting parties are pleased that the Lapis-Lazuli agreement is being signed at this conference.

- Subsequent to the signing of the Chabahar agreement in 2016, the first 170-ton shipment of wheat arrived in Afghanistan from India in October this year.

- The aim of Afghanistan is to expand corridors both north and south, bringing lower cost transport and better infrastructure as a whole to the region.

- The Tajik-Turkmen-Afghan Transnational Railroad project will connect provinces and create new jobs in these countries and beyond, including supporting security by improving the socio-economic condition of their populations.

- Peace and prosperity for the region is a goal, which has a central role as a pivot for regional connectivity and a key for Afghanistan to achieve stability.

- SAARC and RECCA’s throng of initiatives are complementary to each other, thus they could usefully explore working together on various projects and initiatives to increase regional connectivity and prosperity.

- The Baku-Tbilisi-Kars (BTK) railway network is a key contributor to regional east-west connectivity.
The salient points raised in the third WGM included the following:

- Afghanistan became the 164th member of the WTO this year, which has upgraded the rules and commitments Afghanistan is making regarding customs procedures and policies.

- Now foreign traders are granted visas upon arrival, including individuals and companies alike in a totally open policy of Afghanistan to the world.

- The range of Afghan companies and products in almost every conceivable sector of these maturing economies, from construction to tourism, are invited to trade with and invest in Turkmenistan.

- Turkey’s projects in Afghanistan are numerous and significant: including airports, roads, dams, and other kinds of infrastructure. Afghanistan is not only at the Heart of Asia but in the heart of Turkey and the Turkish nation.

- Hard infrastructure is necessary but insufficient for increasing trade, and a regional visa is a worthy goal.

- USAID will invest in energy infrastructure connectivity and support regional trade, private sector, women’s empowerment, B2B, and labor initiatives. Afghanistan should focus on a few key areas in order to get to success, as success breeds success.

- There is an open invitation to RECCA countries to develop joint SEZs with one another; feasibility studies are required first, and then partners can reach out to investors in unison.

- Central South Asia is one of the least integrated regions in the world, marked by a lack of trade and transit agreements; however, significant recent progress has been made in the eyes of the private sector.

- The WTO platform is a crucial platform for negotiating new trade deals in the region, and a public-private aim should be to identify export sectors with comparative advantages and prioritize their development.

- There needs to be an emphasis on workforce development related to large infrastructure projects, and ensuring that development projects don’t just improve economic performance but also create jobs.

- The aim of the sizable Labor Exchange and Remittances Project involves the recruitment of over 200,000 Afghan guest workers and opportunities related to remittances.

- RECCA’s new approach involves the bankability of projects, as well as the synergy and complementarity at different levels: between RECCA and NPPs; between RECCA and other regional platforms; and between RECCA and transport corridors.

- RECCA-VII also presents several new projects: (1) a RECCA Joint Chamber of Commerce and Industry (RCCI), to connect businesses across the region and create joint ventures on priority projects; (2) a RECCA Women’s empowerment project, to help women-owned businesses by getting their products to regional and global markets; and (3) a RECCA Center for Research and Evaluation (CRE), to facilitate joint research and analytical initiatives/impact assessments/initial feasibility studies and ensure bankability so that investment roadshows can be organized.

- Overall there needs to be improved planning and monitoring of RECCA priority projects, increased involvement of other countries (with a move toward joint ownership and shared projects), and ongoing excellent work by the national focal points who have performed admirably.
RECCA-VII

DAY 2 15 NOVEMBER 2017

MINISTERIAL SESSION

His Excellency Rashid Meredov, Deputy Chairman of the Cabinet of Ministers and Minister of Foreign Affairs of Turkmenistan, His Excellency Sarwar Danish, Second Vice President of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan, and His Excellency Salahuddin Rabbani, Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan addressed the inauguration session.

H.E. Foreign Minister Meredov welcomed all participants to Turkmenistan and extended the warm greetings and wishes for the success of the Conference on behalf of His Excellency the President of Turkmenistan Mr. Gurbanguly Berdymuhamedov. Foreign Minister Meredov said that “holding the RECCA VII is a necessary and timely step aimed at further consolidating our joint actions for stability and development in Afghanistan.” He added that Turkmenistan pays a special attention to its relations with Afghanistan. Foreign Minister Meredov stated that “the regional cooperation initiated within the framework of the RECCA today certainly serves as an effective mechanism capable to comprehensively affect situation in Afghanistan and beyond”. He stressed the importance of large scale infrastructure projects such as TAPI gas pipeline project; electricity transmission lines including TAP 500; regional railways as well as the Lapis Lazuli Route Agreement and stated that “Afghanistan has a real opportunity to become an important chain in international transport corridors passing through Central Asia from North to South and from East to West”.

Foreign Minister Meredov highlighted the importance of strong political, diplomatic and financial economic assistance to these projects by the world community. He also stressed the importance of SMEs promotion and market access for Afghan businesses and welcomed, in this context, the convening of the business forum, the special event on women’s entrepreneurship and the exhibition on the sidelines of RECCA VII. Foreign Minister Meredov concluded his remarks by saying that “today I would like to underline Turkmenistan’s continued stand for active and meaningful participation in these significant and much needed undertakings for the benefit of progress and development of brotherly Afghanistan, for peace, cooperation and prosperity in our region.”

His Excellency, Second Vice President Danish, thanking the Government of Turkmenistan for hosting RECCA VII in Ashgabat, highlighted the exemplary growing cooperation between Afghanistan and Turkmenistan in a wide range of areas. H.E. Vice President Danish also thanked the RECCA regional and partner countries and organizations and stated that their participation at RECCA VII is an indication of their commitment towards our shared responsibility for strengthening regional cooperation, addressing our common
challenges, and making best use of the existing cooperation opportunities in the region. H.E. Vice President Danish also spoke about the common culture and shared history across the wider region as a solid foundation for regional cooperation and integration. He highlighted the commitment of Afghanistan to sharing the benefits of its centrality as a center for regional and inter-regional trade and transit, as well as the role that RECCA is playing in this regard. He referred to the recent achievements in the area of regional economic cooperation including the signing of the Lapis Lazuli Route Agreement on the sidelines of RECCA VII and said that “all these efforts and achievements will definitely turn our dreams into reality and will help us revive the historical Silk Road and achieve lasting stability and prosperity in the wider region.” H.E. Vice President Danish also stressed the importance of addressing the challenges such as infrastructure gaps and trade and transit barriers as well as the inter-connected security challenges and the importance of shared responsibility in addressing them.

H.E. Salahuddin Rabbani, Minister of Foreign Affairs of Afghanistan thanked the Government and people of Turkmenistan, for hosting RECCA VII and for the warm hospitality extended to all participants. Foreign Minister Rabbani also expressed his gratitude to Turkmenistan for being one of Afghanistan’s strongest partner countries and said that Turkmenistan is making a profound contribution to both RECCA and the Heart of Asia-Istanbul Process and is a key partner in the implementation of major projects such as the TAPI gas pipeline, TAP-500KV, Lapis Lazuli Route and regional railway initiatives. He also thanked the Governments of India, Pakistan, Turkey, and Tajikistan for hosting the previous RECCA Meetings.

Foreign Minister Rabbani stated that the 7th RECCA Meeting takes place at a time when the need for economic growth, stability, and confidence-building is greater than ever before across our wider region. He emphasized in this context that RECCA VII provides a timely opportunity to assess our shared needs; to discuss the challenges that confront us; and to identify concrete steps towards the economic integration of our wider region. He highlighted the promising progress made since RECCA VI in the implementation of several regional cooperation and investment projects, ranging from large-scale energy projects such as the TAPI and CASA-1000 to regional railway projects such as the Five-Nation Railway; transport and transit corridors such as Chabahar and the Belt & Road Initiative; as well as the Digital Silk Road communications network. He in particular highlighted that the signing of the Lapis Lazuli Route Agreement marked a milestone in our collective efforts towards greater connectivity across Eurasia.

Foreign Minister Rabbani stressed the importance of reviving the Silk Road transport and commercial networks and highlighted in this context, the need for addressing infrastructure gaps through joint fund mobilization and investment promotion; unlocking the potential for trade complementarity across the wider region; and ensuring synergy and complementarity between RECCA and other regional platforms across Eurasia. He added that “RECCA is well-positioned to serve as a coordinating platform in this wider context.” Foreign Minister Rabbani concluded his statement by saying that “Let us bear in mind that our shared success will have far-reaching economic and security dividends for regional stability and international peace.”

The following countries and organizations delivered a statement at the RECCA-VII ministerial session on November 15, 2017 in Ashgabat Turkmenistan:

(in alphabetical order)

- Australia
- Azerbaijan
- Brazil
- Canada
- China
- Egypt
- Finland
- France
- Georgia
- Germany
- India
- Iraq
- Islamic Republic of Iran
- Indonesia
- Italy
- Japan
- Kazakhstan
- Korea
- Kyrgyz Republic
- Malaysia
- Norway
- Islamic Republic of Pakistan
- Qatar
- Russian Federation
- Sweden
- Switzerland
- Tajikistan
- Turkey
- Ukraine
- United Arab Emirates
- United Kingdom
- Uzbekistan
- ADB
- AKDN
- CICA
- DFID
- ECO
- EU
- FAO
- IDB
- IFC
- ILO
- ITC
- Kuwait Fund
- OIC
- OSCE
- SAARC
- Saudi Fund
- SCO
- TRACECA
- UNAMA
- UNCTAD
- UNDP
- UNECE
- UNESCO
- UNIDO
- UNRCPD
- UN Office in Turkmenistan
- USAID
- World Bank
SUMMARIES OF THE STATEMENTS MADE BY A NUMBER OF COUNTRIES AND ORGANIZATIONS:

Summaries of the rest of statements will be included in the final version of the report at a later stage.

**Australia** has contributed $20 million to a new Economic Infrastructure Support Facility in Afghanistan – managed by the World Bank – which will provide support for the development of regional energy and transport infrastructure projects. Australia is pleased to be a substantial contributor to the multilateral development banks to provide critical infrastructure funding in support of the region's integration, and it encourages regional partners to continue working closely together to overcome the very real risks and security constraints to building regional connectivity.

**Azerbaijan** is pleased to contribute to many projects that strengthen inter-regional connectivity between Afghanistan and its neighbors (including as co-lead, together with Turkmenistan, of the Regional Infrastructure Confidence Building Measure of the Heart of Asia-Istanbul Process), such as the East-West trans-regional railway corridor which is an integral part of the Lapis Lazuli Route, the expansion of the Baku International Sea Trade Port facilities, and two new broadband internet highway connectivity projects.

**Brazil** views capacity-building as one of the best contributions to assist Afghanistan and its society, and in this regard, Brazil has offered technical cooperation to Afghanistan. The Brazilian Agency for Cooperation and the University of Lavras – a leading institution in agricultural sciences – have offered to implement a project on agricultural practices through farmer education, aiming to foster the dynamics of the agricultural supply networks in Afghanistan.

**Canada** stated that the core of its engagement in Afghanistan is the promotion and protection of human rights, especially for women and girls. It further stressed that ensuring that regional trade cooperation includes women and girls – and takes their needs and rights into consideration – is essential to ensuring a brighter and more inclusive sustainable economic future for all Afghans and regional partners.

**China** pledged vigorous support of the full development of Afghan stability, sovereignty, and prosperity, noting its construction of Afghan hospitals, universities, tech and training centers, crop irrigation projects, and housing projects and likely funding of a cross-border fiber optic cable. As part of its BRI, China highlighted both the Five Nations Railway project as well as the launch of the freight railway project linking Jiansgsu Province with Hairatan via Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan.

**Georgia** pledged further intensification of its commitment to Central South Asian trade, transit, and overall economic cooperation, with particular regard to the transport sector. Georgia strongly supports the Lapis Lazuli corridor project, of which it is a member. It believes a critical element of the region's future success lies in new trade and transit corridors.

**Germany** believes RECCA to be an important initiative to promote good neighborly relations and regional economic cooperation between Afghanistan and its partners in the region. Apart from large infrastructure projects (which are important to further regional integration), smaller projects that can achieve quick impact results for the benefit of the people are also critical. Germany welcomes the RECCA Business Forum and RECCA's focus on the economic empowerment of women to engage the private sector in order to meet the challenges of the future.

**India** stated one of its key priorities is building robust, reliable, year-round connectivity for Afghanistan, asserting that a lack of connectivity directly impacts the economic, security, and political stability in Afghanistan. Thus, the Chabahar Agreement, the India-Afghanistan Trade and Investment Show, and the India-Afghanistan Air Freight Corridor between Delhi and Kabul/Kandahar together represent major milestones in the new era of enhanced connectivity for Afghanistan, West Asia, and beyond to Eurasia.

**Indonesia** highlighted that bilateral trade with Afghanistan has increased by more than 100% in 2017 compared to 2016 and that Afghanistan has the 13th largest investment realization value in Indonesia among Asian countries with 40 projects worth approximately US$ 12.3 million. In its Afghan projects Indonesia is focusing particularly on energy and power development, SME support, and women’s empowerment in the form of a new Afghanistan Women’s Chamber of Commerce and Industry. It further noted it sent the first visit of its state-owned construction company delegation to Afghanistan in September 2017 with the expectation of involvement in major additional Afghan infrastructure development.

**Islamic Republic of Iran** pledged support for peace and stability in Afghanistan.
and the whole region. Iran views itself as well placed in terms of road and rail infrastructure to fully utilize and partner with Afghan transit capacities. In particular it values the Chabahar corridor as the east axis of the region, with a December 2017 inauguration of the first phase of the Chabahar Port Development Plan. In addition, it remains fully committed to construction of the road project in Farah Province, as well the completion of third section of the Khaf-Herat railway.

**Japan** has supported the efforts to improve connectivity of the region, e.g. feasibility studies for railway construction and the Salang Corridor rehabilitation project. Japan further stated at the Brussels Conference that it would commit 40 billion yen per year for four years starting from 2017. At the same time, Japan urged Afghanistan to achieve progress on issues such as electoral reform and security. Afghanistan needs to develop its human resources, enact domestic legislation, and encourage its industries. Since 2001 Japan has assisted with approximately 6.4 billion US dollars, with the aim of contributing to the international efforts towards Afghanistan's self-reliance, while encouraging Afghanistan's efforts to be self-reliant through an outcome-oriented approach.

**Saudi Arabia** noted its full-fledged support for the stable development of Afghanistan and highlighted total assistance since 2001 of US$ 640 million, out of which $190 million has gone into humanitarian assistance. Saudi Arabia supported the financing of the Kabul-Kandahar-Herat road project, is committed to co-financing the Armaailk-Sabzak-Qalainau road project with $118 million.

**Turkey** considers RECCA as an important platform in promoting economic growth, poverty reduction, and political and economic security in Afghanistan and the region. Turkey hosted the RECCA Business Forum in March 2017 and welcomed representatives and businessmen from the RECCA countries to Istanbul to discuss trade and investment opportunities in Afghanistan and its region. The transport projects of Lapis Lazuli, Chababar Port, Five Nations Railway Link, Belt and Road, and Regional Customs and Border Management Cooperation will integrate the economies of the region and contribute to the revival of Afghan economy.

**Ukraine** pledged support to Afghanistan in the form of pipes, equipment, and construction of the TAPI pipeline, the TAT railway, and the CASA-1000 transmission line. Furthermore, it pledged support for joint Afghan-Tajik projects.

**United Kingdom** stated that RECCA has the potential to demonstrate the power of regional economic cooperation by bringing increased stability, security, and prosperity to Afghanistan and the region. The UK is pleased with the progress on CASA-1000, TAPI, and TAP-500 Kv and to further maximize RECCA’s full potential, the Government of Afghanistan is encouraged to coalesce around a united vision for regional economic cooperation to ensure RECCA priorities align with Afghanistan’s national budget and donors’ plans.

**United States** stated that through RECCA, and other fora like the Heart of Asia and CAREC, we strive to enhance regional security and stability, while working toward the goal of greater economic opportunity for all citizens within a regional economy. The U.S. remains committed to renewing efforts across the region to strengthen academic and professional relationships, reduce barriers to trade, strengthen infrastructure, and protect vulnerable populations. It further noted that we must continue efforts to build a regional energy market through projects like CASA-1000, TAPI, and TUTAP. It further supports facilitating trade and transport by ensuring the fair and successful implementation of existing bilateral and regional trade agreements, and working to develop agreements where none exist today. Finally, the U.S. stressed that we must all work together to link businesses and people across borders.

**Conference on Interaction and Confidence-Building Measures in Asia (CICA)** is focusing its support for Afghanistan on helping to provide the elucidation of Confidence Building Measures. In accordance with the Catalogue of confidence building measures, CICA is implementing CBMs in the military-political dimension, economic dimension, environmental dimension, human dimension, as well as the fight against new threats and challenges that include terrorism and illicit drug production and trafficking. Afghanistan is the co-coordinator for CBMs in the areas of new challenges and threats. It is hoped that these measures will augment the international efforts aimed at peace, stability, and reconstruction of Afghanistan. CICA stated that what distinguishes RECCA from other initiatives in Afghanistan is that it is a regional initiative and takes into account the problems that could have impact on the entire region.

**Economic Cooperation Organization (ECO)** promotes the economic development of a region of over 470 million inhabitants and is endowed with vast natural and human resources, including the people of Afghanistan. ECO promotes trade, quality management, banking and finance, transport and regional connectivity, agriculture and food security, energy efficiency and environment, tourism, disaster risk reduction, health, and efforts to combat drug trafficking and organized crime through regional frameworks and networks for cooperation. ECO has also developed Afghanistan-friendly projects, including rail and road transit corridors, and it has
established a Special Reconstruction Fund for Afghanistan, with a view to assisting the country in overall efforts to respond to its developmental needs and requirements. For Afghanistan, with the exception of China, five out of six of Afghanistan’s neighbors are members of the ECO.

**European Union (EU)** promotes regional economic cooperation through the Heart of Asia- Istanbul Process, supporting trade, commerce and investment opportunities as confidence building measures. The RECCA and Heart of Asia formats are complementary, serving to reinforce regional and international engagement in support of peace and prosperity in Afghanistan. The EU will support any format or venue that serves this purpose. The 28 Ministers of Foreign Affairs of EU Member States have just adopted their new EU- Afghanistan Strategy (Foreign Affairs Council, 16 October 2017) with four priorities: peace, regional stability, and security; democracy; economic/human development; and migration. Afghanistan and its region, therefore, have the strength of support from the EU’s 28 countries.

**International Trade Centre (ITC)** advances RECCA’s objectives by supporting, with EU-funding, small-and-medium-sized enterprises to overcome the many challenges that make it difficult, if not impossible, for SMEs to reach markets in the region and beyond. It supports government institutions to strengthen their capacity to formulate and implement trade strategies and policies and to facilitate the smooth cross-border movement of goods. In addition, the ITC is helping to equip Afghan businesses to better seize the opportunities stemming from accession to the WTO.

**Islamic Development Bank (IDB)** drew attention to the impressive US$15.2 billion pledged by 75 countries and 26 international organizations and agencies at the 2016 Brussels Conference on Afghanistan. The IDB has approved US$74 million to support construction of the Kabul Ring Road Project, and while it supports several other Afghan projects it is also considering supporting the Kabul Solar Energy Program. In particular the IDB reinforced its previous approval of US$ 155 million for CASA-1000 and US$ 700 million for the TAPI pipeline. It also called attention to the importance of developing the ports in Iran and Pakistan related to Afghanistan and Central South Asian connectivity.

**OPEC Fund for International Development** has extended a package of financial assistance to Afghanistan that includes several programs in the health, water supply, and agriculture sectors. Our most recent assistance has been directed towards the education sector, to enhance access to quality education, particularly for girls, and to support the development of vocational education and promote education as a vector for peace, sustainable development and socio-economic integration. In addition, the Regional Interconnection Transmission Project, co-financed by OFID in Tajikistan, has provided substantial benefit to Afghanistan since its completion in June 2011, lending support to priority investments discussed by RECCA’s “Regional Energy & Natural Resources Cooperation” Working Group.

**South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC)** underscored the importance of linking South Asia with other regions, including Central Asia and beyond, by all modes of connectivity through national, regional and sub-regional measures. SAARC Motor Vehicles, Railways, and Air Services agreements are under consideration for improving regional connectivity. For the benefit of Afghanistan and other SAARC members, it is hoped that these important agreements will be signed during the upcoming Nineteenth SAARC Summit.

**United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (UNESCAP)** in support of trans-regional connectivity has recently supported the Asian Highway, the Trans-Asian Railway, and dry ports including in Turkmenistan. In support of Afghanistan and land-locked countries it is implementing a project on South Asia-Central Asia transport connectivity, with a series of related analytical reports connecting the region to China’s BRI. It is currently supporting Afghan WTO accession, statistical capacity building, climate-resistant agriculture, sustainable energy, disaster risk reduction, and ICT connectivity.

**United Nations Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO)** pledged additional support to the Afghan Citizens Charter, women’s economic empowerment, urban development, comprehensive agricultural development (including value chains), job creation, youth entrepreneurship, SMEs, renewable energy, national infrastructure, management of pollutants, and the Afghan National Standards Authority. The new UNIDO Country Program pledges US$ 14 million to the areas of sustainable livelihoods via private sector development, industrial competitiveness via Afghan industrial policy, entrepreneurship education via technical and vocational education and training, and renewable energy via energy efficiency support for SMEs.
The Lapis Lazuli Route Agreement was signed on November 15, 2017 on the sidelines of RECCA-VII, marking an important milestone in the collective efforts towards deepening connectivity and enhancing trade in the wider RECCA region. Three technical meetings on the Lapis Lazuli Route Agreement were held over the previous two years, with the final one on November 2016 in Baku. The Agreement has been developed with a view to enhance regional economic integration and trade-based connectivity between the countries of Afghanistan, Turkmenistan, Azerbaijan, Georgia, and Turkey including through building an integrated transit and transport system among the contracting parties.

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The Lapis Lazuli Corridor complements other transport corridors in the wider region. It begins from Aqina in northern Faryab province and Torghundi in western Herat (both in Afghanistan), and continues to the port (on the Caspian Sea) of Turkmenbashi in Turkmenistan; after passing the Caspian Sea, the route continues on to Baku, capital of Azerbaijan, and then connects onward to Tbilisi, capital of Georgia, as well as the Georgian ports of Poti and Batumi; finally, the corridor connects to the cities of Kars and Istanbul, Turkey, at the entrance of Europe.

Lapis Lazuli’s projected impact is considerable not only because most of the needed infrastructure is already in place, but also because most of the investment required will focus on improving policy and governance. The Economic Rate of Return and Net Present Value still need to be established, but with a discount rate applied at 12%, the overall returns are expected to be positive. The Lapis Lazuli Corridor will connect with Turkey’s Middle Corridor Project and will also compliment other regional transport corridors such as the Five Nations Railway Corridor.

The Lapis Lazuli Corridor is also geared toward expanding the economic opportunities of citizens in the wide range of countries who will benefit from this new transport corridor. The provision of facilities for transit and simplification of customs procedures constitute two important pillars of cooperation under the agreement. Key priorities under the initiative in the medium to long term include: 1) improving road conditions and transit facilities along major highways; 2) expanding rail links between Afghanistan and Turkey and beyond; 3) improving multi-modal land ports in priority places in each of the five Lapis Lazuli Route countries; and 4) undertaking a Cost-Benefit Analysis on establishing Cross-Border Economic Zones between the countries along the corridor.

The name “Lapis Lazuli” is derived from the historic route that Afghanistan’s lapis lazuli and other semiprecious stones were exported along, over 2,000 years ago, to the Caucasus, Russia, the Balkans, Europe, and North Africa.
The RECCA-VI Academic Forum, held on 13 October 2017 in Ashgabat, Turkmenistan, was opened by H.E. Vapa Hajyev, Deputy Foreign Minister of Turkmenistan, H.E. Adela Raz, Deputy Foreign Minister for Economic Cooperation of Afghanistan, and Mrs. Natalya Drozd, Head of the OSCE Center in Ashgabat.

Deputy Minister Raz in her keynote speech spoke about the importance of regional economic cooperation and the emergence of various regional cooperation frameworks in the wider region. She in particular elaborated on the two prominent Afghanistan-focused regional cooperation frameworks namely the Regional Economic Cooperation Conference on Afghanistan (RECCA) and the Heart of Asia-Istanbul Process (HoA-IP). She stated that RECCA is an effective regional cooperation framework, aimed at promoting cross-border economic cooperation, through prioritized economic and investment projects that are capable of contributing to growth, job creation, income generation, and confidence-building, across the wider Central, South and Southwest Asia and beyond.

Deputy Minister Raz reiterated that our vision under RECCA is to “help unlock the potential for regional and inter-regional economic cooperation as well as continental trade by sharing the benefits of the centrality of Afghanistan as a land-bridge between Central Asia, South Asia, China, Middle East and Europe”. She added that Afghanistan provides the shortest and most cost-effective routes for roads, railways, pipelines and transmission lines between South and Central Asia and that such connectivity is not only an important element of economic integration between these two regions but also a pre-condition for future sustainable growth and economic development.

Deputy Minister Raz concluded her remarks by encouraging further economic research under RECCA and possible joint research activities between RECCA and other regional platforms including through establishing a research center under RECCA.

Four panel discussions were then held with scholars and technical experts from across Central, South, and Southwest Asia, as well as China and the United States, on “Enhancing Regional Cooperation in the Field of Energy”, “Assessment of Regional and Inter-Regional Connectivity”, “Prospective and Potential for Regional Trade & Transit Facilitation, B2B, P2P, Communications, and Labor Support”, “Exploring New Avenues for Economic Cooperation and Integration in the Region with a Focus on the Role of Afghanistan.”

From varying regional perspectives from within Eurasia and beyond, the scholars and technical experts underscored opportunities to enhance regional economic cooperation with Afghanistan. They also identified major impediments to unlock the full potential for integrating the economies of Central, South, and Southwest Asia and build bridges between traders and business entrepreneurs across the region. The speakers also considered the role that regional countries and the existing regional platforms, giving special attention to the Regional Economic Cooperation Conference on Afghanistan, can play in further accelerating economic cooperation across the region. They further highlighted, among other issues, (i) the importance of addressing the investment deficit for infrastructure development; (ii) the need to implement effectively previous RECCA meetings, including transit trade agreements; and (iii) the importance of fostering greater synergies among various regional frameworks and transport corridors in the wider region, including the SAARC, CAREC, ECO, and the Belt-and-Road Initiative.
MAJOR RECOMMENDATIONS FROM THE RECCA-VII ACADEMIC FORUM

SESSION 1: ENHANCING REGIONAL COOPERATION IN THE FIELD OF ENERGY

**Moderator:**
- Miss. Zukhra Bektepova, Economic Officer, OSCE Vienna

**Speakers:**
- Dr. Mir Ahmad Javid Sadaat, Deputy Minister, Ministry of Mines and Petroleum, Afghanistan
- Mr. Muhammetnur Halylow, Director of the Scientific-Research Institute of Natural Gas of the “Turkmengaz” State Concern
- Dr. Arshi Saleem Hashmi, Professor, National Defense University (NDU) Islamabad, Pakistan

- Building on the TAPI natural gas pipeline's progress, including the recent completion of the third stage of the Galkynysh Gas Field and expected completion, in 2018, of the Turkmenistan section of the pipeline, efforts should be redoubled to complete major regional economic cooperation project in the coming few years, especially as it has the potential to serve as a “game changer” for economic development and cooperation between the countries of Central and South Asia.

- Despite the global drop in the price of the sale of natural gas—due to the discovery of new gas deposits in the U.S. and elsewhere utilizing new technologies—natural gas exploitation has the potential to significantly reduce poverty and to benefit economically the countries of Central, South, and Southwest Asia, representing the beginning of a “New Energy Era”. Natural gas is also far cleaner than coal and oil production and use, thereby helping to reduce carbon emissions and the negative effects associated with dramatic climate change.

- Three important issues that must be addressed in connection with its participation in the TAPI project are: i) natural gas anchors in consumer countries; and ii) managing tight margins.

- For Afghanistan to fully develop its rich minerals sector, it will rely increasingly on a steady supply of reliable and relatively inexpensive sources of power.

- The CASA-1000 power transmission project is also demonstrating that high-levels of cooperation between the countries of Central and South Asia is possible, even on a geographically and technically complicated project.

- Together, TAPI, CASA-1000, and more recently TAP-500 can serve as the basis for a new, integrated regional energy market and electrical grid for the benefit of the countries of Central and South Asia.

SESSION 2: ASSESSMENT OF REGIONAL AND INTERREGIONAL CONNECTIVITY

**Moderator:**
- Mr. James L. Creighton, Distinguished Fellow, East West Institute (EWI)

**Speakers:**
- Mr. Yama Shams, Chief Executive Director, Afghanistan Railways, Kabul
- Mr. Chen Xiaochen, Director of International Studies, Chongyang Institute for Financial Studies, Renmin University of China
- Dr. Mandana Tishehyar, Allameh Tabataba’i University (ATU), Tehran, Islamic Republic of Iran

- One expert recommended that there be less of a focus among political leaders in the region on hard security issues and more on tangible forms of economic cooperation in the areas of, for example, transport, trade, and energy, where the countries of Central, South, and Southwest Asia stand to benefit through their close interactions.

- Participants acknowledged that national economic development and infrastructure projects stand to benefit immensely by being part of a larger regional project or network, in terms of attracting public and private capital and technical knowhow from countries and businesses both within and beyond the region.

- Another scholar stressed the importance of developing further the theoretical foundations of regional economic integration, so that theory can catch up with the practical strategies and progress associated with new initiatives, such as CAREC and the Belt-and-Road Initiative.

- The “empty train problem” for the new connection between Afghanistan and China merits high attention from political and business leaders, as this new example of Afghanistan participation in the Belt-and-Road Initiative has considerable potential in terms of generating economic benefits for the wider region.

Moderator:
- Mr. Myrat Begliyev, Deputy Rector of the International University for the Humanities and Development

Speakers:
- Dr. Mohammad Najib Azizi, Chairman, Afghanistan Telecommunications Regulatory Authority (ATRA), Kabul
- Mr. Jan-Peter Olters, Country Manager, World Bank Tajikistan
- Ms. Annie Cowan, Program Associate, East West Institute (EWI)

- Maximize potential of business to business opportunities by highlighting business road shows, reaching out to international Chambers of Commerce, and soliciting support from extensive Afghan Diaspora to find companies willing to partner with Afghanistan on specific bankable pilot programs that can help to prove Afghanistan is open for business while highlighting specific laws, rules and regulations that must be fixed.

- Continue to reform the customs, visa and cross border procedures.
- Continue to eliminate obstacles to regional energy, trade, and rail agreements. Many have been signed but not executed.
- When talking about security to businesses, focus on security from a district and village level. It is unfortunate when an entire country is viewed as insecure when, in fact, many places are either perfectly secure today or at least secure enough to take a risk with possibility of higher economic reward.
- Streamline national drivers licensing laws so the all provinces respect drivers’ licenses from other provinces. This seemingly small step could dramatically improve the efficiency of transporting goods across Afghanistan.

- Improve Afghanistan’s brand by getting out the message that Afghanistan is open for business. Counter arguments regarding financial and physical security concerns.

- Structure regional agreements as cost sharing enterprises to reduce risk to individual signatories and entice international funding from World Bank, Asian Development Bank, and others. Use Public-Private Partnerships whenever possible.

- Continue to attack corruption vigorously to build the confidence of the people. Make sure that governments and businesses understand the efforts.

- Participants in this concluding session also highlighted the strong correlation between infrastructure development, in areas such as transport, energy and Information and Communications Technologies, and the overall economic growth and development in the wider region.

SESSION 4: EXPLORING NEW AVENUES FOR ECONOMIC COOPERATION AND INTEGRATION IN THE REGION WITH A FOCUS ON THE ROLE OF AFGHANISTAN.

Moderator:
- Hassan Soroosh, Acting Director General, Directorate General for Economic Cooperation, MoFA, Afghanistan

Speakers:
- Mr. Enayatullah Nabil, Senior Advisor to the Minister, Ministry of Finance, Afghanistan
- Ms. Meerim Aitkulova, Expert at the NISI KR
- Miss. Zukhra Bektepova, Economic Officer, OSCE Vienna
- Dr. Richard Ponzio, Director of the Just Security 2020 Program at the Stimson Center

- RECCA should continue contribute to five main economic cooperation clusters in Central, South, and Southwest Asia, namely: i) energy; ii) transport networks; iii) trade and transit facilitation; iv) communications; and v) B2B partnership and labor support, and it should focus on both the challenges and impediments to project implementation, as well as the prospects for cooperation and opportunities in each major economic sector.

- Participants in this concluding session also highlighted the strong correlation between infrastructure development, in areas such as transport, energy and Information and Communications Technologies, and the overall economic growth and development in the wider region.

- The expert panelists further recommended the need for more integrated efforts across the region to improve the level and pace of implementation for the commitments made (and overcoming associated bottlenecks) or the actions and activities recommended at the RECCA meetings.

- Investment deficit need to be overcome with respect to infrastructure development, and the development of investment criteria for “bankable” regional cooperation and investment projects under RECCA would be helpful in this regard.

- Diversification of fund mobilization was also emphasized, highlighting the importance of attracting capital and investment from diverse private sector and public sources including the Sovereign Wealth Funds, new regional funds and investment banks, as well as innovative financing modalities such as PPP and power purchase agreements.

- The need for model bankable projects for their replication across a number of key economic sectors was also stressed, including, for example, in the areas of power generation and multi-modal inland ports.
Academic Forum

- Simplification of the procedures for grants and loans was also emphasized during the concluding session.

- A lack of coordination and synergy at different levels was also mentioned as a major challenge, including among major regional economic cooperation platforms, between transport and transit corridors, and between a growing number of robust economic corridors.

- Some speakers were of the view that, along with hard infrastructure and physical connectivity which have witnessed considerable progress over the past few years, there is the need for intensified efforts with respect to the soft infrastructure required for trade expansion and investment promotion in our region. Customs harmonization, policy coordination, improved investment environment, greater B2B partnership, air connectivity and visa facilitation were highlighted in this context. In addition, concerns were raised about trade and transit-related barriers, especially a worrying number of non-tariff barriers in the region.

- Finally, the scholars assembled in Ashgabat on 13 October 2017 for the RECCA Academic Forum recommended improving research capacity and convening more capacity building programs for the priority economic sectors identified through the Ministerial Meetings of the Regional Economic Cooperation Conference on Afghanistan.

Dr Faramarz Tamana, Director General of the Center for Strategic Studies at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Afghanistan delivered the closing remarks.

DECLARATION

The Seventh Regional Economic Cooperation Conference on Afghanistan (RECCA-VII) was concluded with the adoption of a declaration.

RECCA VII Declaration is a concise and action-oriented outcome document serving as a roadmap for the efforts and actions in the next two years under RECCA. Under the declaration, thanked the Government of Turkmenistan for hosting and co-chairing RECCA-VII as an important international gathering in an excellent manner.

The participants acknowledged Afghanistan’s central role as a pivotal hub for regional and inter-regional trade, transit, and transport as well as the role that RECCA is playing in sharing the benefits of this centrality in support of sustainable development and stability in Afghanistan and the wider region. In this context, they expressed appreciation and strong support for the ongoing efforts and commitment of the Government of Afghanistan as well as the continued efforts by regional and partner countries and organizations under RECCA.

The participants also emphasized that RECCA VII builds on the commitments made during the previous six meetings of RECCA (Kabul, 2005; New Delhi, 2006; Islamabad, 2009; Istanbul, 2010; Dushanbe, 2012; Kabul, 2015) as well as the measurable progress made with respect to the implementation of the priority projects in areas such as energy; transport networks; trade and transit facilitation, communications and business-to-business partnerships and labor support;

Under RECCA VII Declaration, the participants also supported RECCA’s new approach to project implementation including new investment criteria such as the bankability of the projects as well as the diversification of fund mobilization and pursuing innovative financing modalities for infrastructure development, including public private partnership and power purchase agreements, with a view to address the investment deficit;

Finally, participants stated that they will work collectively to address the implementation bottlenecks, including through a strengthened network of RECCA National Focal Points and will strive to achieve the above deliverables including through i) the organization of Investment Road Shows and Regional Business Forums; ii) the preparation of Bankable Projects Briefs for Public and Private Investors; iii) entering RECCA into new strategic partnerships with other regional bodies and initiatives and bringing greater synergy among them; iv) bringing synergy among various transport and transit corridors in the wider RECCA region; v) preparation of the RECCA Annual Reviews; vi) strengthening research capacity under RECCA and vii) transforming the RECCA Website into an interactive web-portal for real-time regional investment promotion and knowledge sharing;

The RECCA VII Declaration also supported the operationalization of the RECCA Chamber of Commerce; the women’s economic empowerment activities under RECCA as well as the establishment of a Center for Research and Evaluation in the framework of RECCA.

[The complete RECCA-VII Declaration resides in Annex II].
Since its inception in 2005, RECCA has grown significantly in structure, the number of participating countries and organizations, as well as in the scope of activities. In the second decade of RECCA’s journey, efforts are being directed towards helping RECCA grow in impact. In support of this over-arching goal, the RECCA platform has undertaken serious economic analysis toward reviewing progress of Afghanistan’s regional economic cooperation priorities and understanding the potential returns on growth, jobs, and public revenue from agreed regional investment opportunities. RECCA has also invested increasingly in the role of the private sector, scholars, and youth in both shaping and implementing regional cooperation policy vis-à-vis Afghanistan, including through Business and Academic Forums, trade shows, and student essay contests.

During the Seventh Regional Economic Cooperation Conference on Afghanistan (RECCA-VII), from 14-15 November in Ashgabat, Turkmenistan, a new RECCA 2.0 vision and approach has been rolled out to consult governments and non-governmental partners across the region and beyond to ensure that the RECCA platform can better provide practical kinds of utility to the entire region of Central, South, and Southwest Asia, including through the development of a truly regionally-led and owned economic cooperation strategy.

As H.E. Salahuddin Rabbani, the Minister of Foreign Affairs for the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan, writes in his opening message of the RECCA Annual Review 2017:

“It is my earnest conviction that with our new approach, as described in these pages under the heading of ‘RECCA 2.0’—and with the continued support from regional and international partners—our dynamic journey over the next two years will move us closer towards realizing our common vision for deepened connectivity and expanded trade across the region.”

Through the adoption of this new RECCA 2.0 vision and approach, the RECCA platform is poised to contribute, more than ever, to serious, technical-level problem-solving—backed-up by robust economic analysis and aggressive private sector outreach—that are together essential to unblocking regional economic cooperation bottlenecks in a timely and effective manner. By encouraging a growing number of new cross-border commercial and economic cooperation achievements, greater regional confidence and trust will follow, which are necessary to overcome long-standing disputes and misunderstandings across the region that, in effect, hold back economic and social progress for the region’s countries and their citizens. In doing so, all Central, South, and Southwest Asians are ready to unleash their full potential and contribute to a new era of prosperity and peace at the crossroads of Eurasia.

Major elements of this innovative new direction for the RECCA platform are:

1. **RECCA National Focal Points** pull together and support the various tracks of this new “RECCA 2.0” approach

2. **RECCA Center for Research & Evaluation** to prepare Bankable Project Briefs for Public and Private Investors, as well as undertake other activities like state-of-the-art research and analysis on priority regional matters

3. **RECCA Chamber of Commerce & Industries** to help mobilize governments and national chambers of commerce in support of Investment Road Shows, Business Forums, and wider B2B cooperation

4. **Prioritize Women’s Economic Empowerment** through Regional Economic Cooperation

5. **Strategic Partnerships** between RECCA and other regional organizations and initiatives

6. **RECCA Interactive Web-Portal** for Regional Investment Promotion and Knowledge Sharing

7. **Synergies with the Afghan Government’s Infrastructure Development Council**

8. **Moving towards a RECCA Economic Cooperation Strategy** for Central, South, and Southwest Asia
The Regional Economic Cooperation Conference on Afghanistan, extending its arc of achievement at the outset of a second decade of progress, has succeeded in both persistently making the case for the mutual benefits from regional economic cooperation and the pivotal role of Afghanistan as a geographic lynchpin connecting the nations and peoples of Central, South, and Southwest Asia, with onward linkages to the massive markets of East Asia, Europe, and the Greater Middle East. At the same time, for this unique platform to thrive and grow in impact, RECCA’s future success will be judged increasingly by how its commitments are implemented and translated into tangible forms of economic, social, and political progress for the region’s peoples and governments—rather than the quality of its strategic plans or forums engaging government, academic, youth, and business leaders. Equally important will be the degree to which RECCA is embraced by leaders and the general population as a fully regionally-led platform, underpinned by a regionally-developed and owned economic cooperation strategy.

To inform discussions at RECCA-VII in Ashgabat, the following eight ideas and recommendations are offered toward transforming RECCA into a truly regionally-led and owned economic platform and strategy for Central, South, and Southwest Asia. They seek to mobilize action toward effective implementation of the regional cooperation and investment projects, related regional policy and regulatory reforms, and the wider agenda presented in this RECCA Annual Review 2017. Together representing the advent of “RECCA 2.0”, they additionally signal the platform’s purposeful extension beyond mainly Afghan-centric priorities to fill significant gaps and connect regional bodies and initiatives around Central, South, and Southwest Asia.

1. Enable the RECCA National Focal Points to pull together and support the various “RECCA 2.0” approach tracks

With a central consensus-building and facilitating support role, the RECCA National Focal Points appointed by all RECCA participating countries are chiefly responsible for ensuring that the main actors in their respective government and business community are properly informed and equipped with the tools to contribute to the RECCA vision and practical action agenda. Through regular communication with the RECCA support team in Kabul, the National Focal Points contribute to the programming and planning of RECCA annual activities, work to ensure that their countries’ equities are represented, and encourage national capabilities to be tapped in support of the following seven elements that together comprise the new “RECCA 2.0” approach.

2. Establish a RECCA Center for Research and Evaluation

In fulfilling its proposed mandate of promoting information exchange and shared analysis by regional partners, the RECCA Center for Research & Evaluation —recommended and elaborated earlier— is well-situated to lead on the preparation of state-of-the-art Bankable Projects Briefs for the Investment Road Shows (see next point), as well as other activities like state-of-the-art research and analysis on regional matters, designed to leverage private and public capital investments and technical ingenuity. Given the timely need to promote the private sector, model bankable projects must be developed for replication across key economic sectors highlighted in this Review, including for example multi-modal inland ports, information and communication technologies, and power generation. With inputs and oversight provided by the RECCA National Focal Points, the RECCA Center for Research & Evaluation could support cutting edge research and analysis projects as well as the development of model bankable projects, in close partnership with relevant partners in regional Finance and sector-specific Ministries, as well as the International Financial Institutions through, for example, the Private Infrastructure Development Group, the Public-Private Infrastructure Advisory Facility, and the World Bank Global Infrastructure Facility.

3. Stand-up a RECCA Chamber of Commerce & Industries to help mobilize governments and national Chambers of Commerce in support of Investment Road Shows, Business Forums, and wider B2B cooperation

A Regional Chamber of Commerce and Industries, in the form of a regional network of leaders from Chambers of Commerce and Industries in Central, South, and Southwest Asia with a light secretariat based in Kabul, has the potential to significantly further regional business-to-business partnerships, trade, and investment expansion goals. Representing RECCA’s growing shift toward implementation and the central role of the private sector in fulfilling its regional economic cooperation agenda, this idea was previously received with great interest by private sector and government partners throughout the region. Specifically, a Regional Chamber of Commerce and Industries is well-poised to initiate a series of Investment Road Shows to showcase lucrative investment opportunities across the broader region, based on bankable projects that have been developed, in part, by the RECCA Center for Research & Evaluation. The road shows would be attended by private sector interests and sovereign wealth funds, providing an opportunity to diversify investment interests, and to overcome the deficit in infrastructure financing for critical anchor, ancillary, and spinoff projects. They would complement broader and more policy-oriented Business Forums and other forms of B2B cooperation.

4. Prioritize women’s economic empowerment through regional economic cooperation

In seeking to further integrate women’s economic empowerment into the RECCA agenda, discussions will take place at RECCA-VII in Ashgabat on such practical issues as promoting access for female entrepreneurs to economic markets across the region, targeted training in business management skills for women, and removing legal barriers to women’s economic participation. RECCA recognizes that women across Central, Southwest, and South Asia have much to contribute to the implementation of the platform’s regional cooperation and investment projects, and they also stand to benefit from their success. It is, therefore, imperative that women across the entire region be engaged in the activities of the new RECCA Chamber of Commerce & Industries (including Investment Road Shows and Business Forums), the biennial Ministerial and Academic Forum meetings of the
platform, and other more targeted support activities to improve economic and political conditions for women to both benefit from and actively contribute to regional economic cooperation. In its initial phase, this new component of the RECCA platform will build upon the regional outreach efforts of the Government of Afghanistan’s new Women’s Economic Empowerment Program.

5 BUILD STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIPS BETWEEN RECCA AND OTHER REGIONAL ORGANIZATIONS AND INITIATIVES

Establishing new Memorandums of Strategic Partnership (MSP) with, for example, CAREC, SAARC, and other regional platforms could help ensure mutually reinforcing synergies with RECCA platform and help to minimize duplication of effort. In undertaking similar arrangements with regional bodies and initiatives across Eurasia, such as the Belt-and-Road Initiative, Middle Corridor project, ECO, Silk Wind, UNSPECA, OSCE, and SCO, RECCA can facilitate strategic coordination, knowledge-sharing, and connectivity between Central Asia, South Asia, Southwest Asia, and even the Far East. In addition, meetings of the two Heart of Asia-Istanbul Process Regional Technical Groups on Trade, Commerce & Investment and Regional Infrastructure could double as preparatory meetings for the biennial RECCA Ministerial Meetings in regional capitals and actively engage the RECCA National Focal Points and periodic RECCA progress updates and Annual Reviews, to ensure effective coordination, monitoring, and the sharing of human, technical, and financial resources between RECCA and the Heart of Asia-Istanbul Process.

6 CONTINUE EFFORTS TO TRANSFORM THE RECCA WEBSITE INTO AN INTERACTIVE WEB-PORTAL FOR REGIONAL INVESTMENT PROMOTION & KNOWLEDGE SHARING

A transformed RECCA website could provide up-to-date details on regional cooperation projects, including status, performance, feasibility studies, economic impact assessments (for example, as produced by the new RECCA Center for Research & Evaluation), and contract details for both public and private sector investment partners. This upgraded RECCA portal will interact closely and build upon the new online business investment in Afghan websites under development through the Heart of Asia-Istanbul Process Trade, Commerce, and Investment Regional Technical Group. In addition, it would facilitate knowledge sharing on regional economic cooperation topics by establishing an online “community of practice”, anchored by the RECCA National Focal Points and the representatives of Regional Chambers of Commerce and Industries and featuring periodic thematic dialogues and a monthly e-newsletter. This interactive web-portal could also host online consultations and an annual student essay contest with youth from across Central, South, and Southwest Asia.

7 SYNERGIES WITH THE AFGHAN GOVERNMENT’S INFRASTRUCTURE DEVELOPMENT COUNCIL

Among the six high-level councils established by the Afghan Government in advance of the 2016 Brussels Conference on Afghanistan is a new Infrastructure Development Council. In support of the National Infrastructure Plan of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan, this new Council (comprised of high-level representation from major Afghan Ministries and Agencies) will prove critical to advancing the RECCA agenda by acting as a focal point for regional cooperation in Kabul—both generating and coordinating developmental projects that are regional in nature—while fostering a conducive climate to improve implementation.

8 TOWARDS FORGING A RECCA ECONOMIC COOPERATION STRATEGY FOR CENTRAL, SOUTH, AND SOUTHWEST ASIA

By transforming the decade-old RECCA platform into “RECCA 2.0” through the development of the first truly regional economic cooperation strategy for Central, South, and Southwest Asia in the long-term, regional government, civil society, and the business leaders will grow RECCA in new directions to achieve a maximum and unique regional socio-economic impact. Some suggested elements of this new instrument for encouraging greater regional coordination, complementarity, and monitoring are:

- **Vision and Goals:** The overarching principles and strategic commitment of Central, South, and Southwest Asia to regional economic cooperation, possibly anchored around a select number of priority Regional Economic Growth & Resource Corridors.

- **Challenges, Emerging Risks, and Opportunities:** A detailed quantitative and qualitative analysis of regional trade and other cross-border economic cooperation trends, including identified new opportunities and emerging obstacles and risks.

- **Priority Regional Economic Growth & Resource Corridors:** Building consensus around a select number of combined priority transport, trade, energy, and communication corridors—building on, in many cases yet extending beyond current—CAREC and BRI corridors, from which major cities, multi-modal land ports, and secondary corridors will benefit from new and deeper interconnections.

- **Regional Economic Cooperation and Investment Project Priorities:** Between 20 and 25 major regional economic cooperation and investment project priorities, with prospects for innovative private and public investment partnerships, in the areas of energy, transport networks, trade & transit facilitation, communications, and business-to-business and labor cooperation.

- **A Comprehensive Monitoring and Evaluation Mechanism:** The RECCA Center for Research and Evaluation (presented earlier on page 35) will monitor and evaluate progress on the RECCA regional economic cooperation agenda between the biennial (every two years) high-level ministerial RECCA meetings.

These ideas are intended to spur and inform discussion at the RECCA-VII forum in Ashgabat and contribute to a long-term program of dialogue and action across the region. Their consideration, adoption, and effective implementation will require regional vision and leadership, combined with sustained capacity-building, network-building, and direct technical and financial support from the region’s international development partners. Towards the hopeful enrichment and realization of this forward-looking vision and roadmap for practical action, the organizers of RECCA-VII welcome feedback and additional ideas from policy-makers, business leaders, civil society representatives, and scholars to further accelerate mutually beneficial economic cooperation between the countries, businesses, and peoples of Central, South, and Southwest Asia.
PREAMBLE
The Seventh Regional Economic Cooperation Conference on Afghanistan (RECCA-VII) was convened in Ashgabat, Turkmenistan on 14-15 November 2017 to further strengthen and enhance regional economic cooperation in support of sustainable development and stability in Afghanistan and across the wider region. His Excellency Rashid Meredov, Deputy Chairman of the Cabinet of Ministers and Minister of Foreign Affairs of Turkmenistan, His Excellency Sarwar Danish, Second Vice President of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan, and His Excellency Salahuddin Rabbani, Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan addressed the inauguration session. The Conference was co-chaired by the Ministers of Foreign Affairs of Turkmenistan and the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan. The Conference brought together high-level delegations and senior representatives from over 67 countries and organizations.

The regional and partner countries and organizations participated in RECCA VII,

Thanking the Government of Turkmenistan for hosting and co-chairing this important international gathering in an excellent manner,

Appreciating the active participation of RECCA regional and partner countries and organizations at the Conference,

Reaffirming the commitment to the purposes and principles of the United Nations Charter as well as adherence to universally recognized principles and norms of international law,

Recognizing the inter-linkages between development and security challenges and acknowledging that a secure, stable, and prosperous Afghanistan is vital to peace, stability and prosperity in the region as a whole.

Reaffirming that regional economic cooperation and integration offers broad opportunities for growth, and can assist with exploiting and developing the long term economic potential that exists in Afghanistan and the wider region; and stressing the need for further advancing regional economic cooperation as an effective means to achieve economic prosperity in Afghanistan and the wider RECCA region.

Acknowledging Afghanistan’s central role as an important hub for regional and inter-regional trade, transit, and transport as well as the role that RECCA is playing in sharing the benefits of this centrality in support of sustainable development and stability in Afghanistan and the wider region. In this context, Expressing appreciation and strong support for the ongoing efforts and commitment of the Government of Afghanistan as well as the continued efforts by regional and partner countries and organizations under RECCA.

Emphasizing that RECCA VII builds on the commitments made during the previous six meetings of RECCA (Kabul, 2005; New Delhi, 2006; Islamabad, 2009; Istanbul, 2010; Dushanbe, 2012; Kabul, 2015) as well as the promising progress made with respect to the implementation of the priority projects in areas such as energy; transport networks; trade and transit facilitation; communications and business-to-business partnerships and labor support;

Supporting RECCA's new approach to project implementation including new investment criteria such as the bankability of the projects as well as the diversification of fund mobilization and pursuing innovative financing modalities for infrastructure development, including public private partnership and power purchase agreements, with a view to address the investment deficit;

Underlining the collective commitments made at the Brussels International Conference on Afghanistan towards deepening and strengthening cooperation to achieve Afghanistan's Self Reliance during the “Transformation Decade of 2015-2024” including the commitments regarding peace, security and regional cooperation;

Affirming that the Heart of Asia-Istanbul Process (HoA-IP) continues to play an important role in promoting regional political, security and economic cooperation through enhancing political dialogue and building trust aimed at promoting peace, stability, and prosperity in Afghanistan and the entire Heart of Asia region, and stressing the importance of closer linkages and complementarities between RECCA and HoA-IP;
Acknowledging the importance of removing non-tariff barriers to trade and transit including through bilateral negotiations on customs cooperation as well as effective implementation of bilateral and multilateral transit-trade agreements and their possible expansion to other countries;

Acknowledging the significant contribution that small and medium size enterprises (SMEs) can make to the economic growth and income generation in Afghanistan and the wider region. Stressing the importance of market access for SMEs in particular for women entrepreneurs.

Welcoming in this context, the inclusion of women’s economic empowerment as a new component of work under RECCA and the convening of the Special Event on Women’s Entrepreneurship on the sidelines of RECCA VII;

Welcoming an increasing number of MoUs signed between the Afghan Chamber of Commerce and Industries (ACCI) and Chambers of Commerce in the region and beyond and supporting the joint initiative by the RECCA Secretariat and ACCI to establish the RECCA Chamber of Commerce and Industries as a regional network aiming at further enhancing business-to-business dialogue and partnership in support of the priority projects under RECCA;

Welcoming the promising progress made regarding the priority projects under RECCA including the steps taken towards the operationalization of the agreement on the Chabahar International Transport and Transit Corridor; completion of the third section of Khaf-Herat Railway, the award of contract on transmission line in Afghanistan under CASA 1000, the ongoing progress under TAPI and completion of the feasibility studies of TAP 500;

Welcoming the signing of the Lapis Lazuli Route Agreement on the sidelines of RECCA VII as a flagship agreement towards deepening connectivity and expanding trade in the wider region;

Supporting the efforts under RECCA to bring synergy and complementarity between RECCA, HoA-IP and other regional bodies such as CAREC, ECO, OSCE, SAARC, SCO, and UNESCAP as well as among various transport and transit corridors and initiatives including the Belt and Road Initiative, the Chabahar Corridor, the Five Nations Railway Corridor, the Middle Corridor including Baku-Tbilisi-Kars Railway, and the Lapis Lazuli Corridor;

Taking note of various bilateral economic cooperation projects between Afghanistan and neighboring countries in areas such as road connectivity, energy, trade as well as air freight connectivity,

Have stated their commitment towards the implementation of the respective regional cooperation and investment projects and their associated deliverables as listed below:

A. ENERGY:

1) The Turkmenistan, Afghanistan, Pakistan and India Gas Pipeline Project (TAPI):
   a) Sign the Pipeline System Rules Agreement, a Host Government Agreement and a Transportation Agreement,
   b) Commence the construction work on TAPI pipeline.
   c) Support the TPCL in accelerating pipeline construction and convening more investment road shows around the world to raise additional funds.

2) The Central Asia-South Asia Regional Energy (CASA-1000) Project:
   a) Complete the environmental and social impact surveys as well as the design and survey works in Afghanistan HVDC line component, 
   b) Finalize the selection and contracting of the project’s engineering firm to minimize delays in completing the HVDC line and converter substations in Tajikistan and Pakistan.

3) Turkmenistan-Afghanistan-Pakistan 500-kV Line (TAP 500):
   a) Prepare technical assessment and design plan and assign the consulting company
   b) Finalize the project’s coordination and monitoring mechanism.
B. TRANSPORT NETWORKS

1) Afghanistan Railway Network – Segments connecting Afghanistan to neighboring countries:
   a) Complete the detail design and commence the construction of Aqina – Andkhoy – Shiberghan (108 km)
   b) Complete the detail design and commence the construction of Torghundi-Herat (173 Km)
   c) Complete the detail design and commence the construction of Chaman-Spinboldak (11.5 km) – Phase I and Spinboldak to Kandahar (96km) – Phase II
   d) Complete the feasibility study and commence the construction of Jalalabad – Torkham railway line (75 km)
   e) Complete the feasibility study and commence the construction of Lashkargah-Bahram Chah (258 Km)
   f) Complete the feasibility study and detail design of the Chabahar – Zaranj – Farah Railway

2) The Five Nations Railway Corridor:
   a) Complete the Fourth Section of Khaf – Herat (Ghorain – Robat Paryan) (36km)
   b) Complete the Kolkhoszobod – Panji Poyon-Shirkhanbandar segment (TajikistanAfghanistan, (63 km)
   c) Complete the detail design and commence the construction of Sherkhan Bandar – Kunduz – Mazar – e - Sharif (187 km)
   d) Complete the detail design and commence the construction of Mazar-i-Sharif - Shiberghan line (170 km)
   e) Complete the feasibility study and commence the detail design and construction of the Sheberghan - Maimane - Qala e Now – Kushk (472 km)

3) Road Priority Projects:
   a) Complete the civil works for the construction of Baghlan-Bamiyan road
   b) Complete the rehabilitation of the Salang road and tunnel
   c) Complete the remaining section of the Afghanistan Ring Road

4) Transport and transit corridors:
   a) Implement the MoU signed between China and Afghanistan under the Belt and Road Initiative.
   b) Complete the internal procedures of the contracting parties required for the entry into force of the International Transport and Transit Corridor (Chabahar Agreement), finalize the additional protocols and complete the infrastructure and facilities required under the agreement in a timely manner,
   c) Complete the internal procedures of the contracting parties required for the entry into force of the Lapis Lazuli Transit, Trade and Transport Route (Lapis Lazuli Corridor), complete or improve the transport infrastructure and procedures as required under the agreement in a timely manner,

C. TRADE AND TRANSIT FACILITATION

1) Complete the internal procedures of the contracting parties required for the entry into force of Cross-border Transport Agreement between Afghanistan, the Kyrgyz Republic and Tajikistan and encourage its possible extension to other countries including Kazakhstan.

2) Review the existing transit trade agreements among the RECCA countries with a view to address their implementation bottlenecks as well as their possible expansion to other countries,

3) Build customs facilities at key crossing points, enhance border management capacities, improve customs procedures, customs harmonization and cooperation including customs-to-customs information sharing.

4) Commence a comprehensive feasibility studies for building Special Economic Zones, Multi Modal Transport and Logistics Facilities in priority places including Zaranj and Aqina in Afghanistan.

5) Accelerate accession to and implementation of the TIR Convention

D. COMMUNICATIONS

1) Complete the Afghan Fiber Optic Ring and its connection with China

2) Accelerate work on the Digital CASA

3) Implement open access policies towards enhancing regional digital connectivity
E. B2B AND LABOR SUPPORT

1) Strengthen efforts in support of food industry development at a regional level and implement the Afghanistan-Kyrgyz Republic-Tajikistan Agro Food Industry Development project based on the findings of the feasibility study.

2) Enhance Regional Business-to-Business Partnerships and in this context, operationalize the RECCA Chamber of Commerce as a regional network to connect businesses and encourage innovative public-private partnerships and direct foreign investment including in the RECCA priority regional projects.

3) Finalize a model bilateral agreement on labor support and develop a regional labor exchange and support strategy to incentivize greater cross-border labor market cooperation.

CONCLUSION

The RECCA regional and partner countries and organizations will work collectively to address the implementation bottlenecks, including the investment needs with respect to the above priority regional cooperation and investment projects, through diversification of fund mobilization attracting investment from a diverse public and private sources including from the new investment banks and sovereign wealth funds.

Toward this end, and through a strengthened network of RECCA National Focal Points, the RECCA regional and partner countries and organizations will strive to achieve the above deliverables including through i) the organization of Investment Road Shows and Regional Business Forums; ii) the preparation of Bankable Projects Briefs for Public and Private Investors; iii) entering RECCA into new strategic partnerships with other regional bodies and initiatives and bringing greater synergy among them; iv) bringing synergy among various transport and transit corridors in the wider RECCA region; v) preparation of the RECCA Annual Reviews; vi) strengthening research capacity under RECCA and vii) transforming the RECCA Website into an interactive web-portal for real-time regional investment promotion and knowledge sharing;

The RECCA regional and partner countries and organizations will support the operationalization of the RECCA Chamber of Commerce; the women’s economic empowerment activities under RECCA as well as the establishment of a Center for Research and Evaluation in the framework of RECCA.

The RECCA VII participants requested the RECCA Secretariat to explore appropriate ways and means to maximize synergy between RECCA, HoA-IP and other regional platforms and make recommendations for consideration by RECCA.

The RECCA VII participants extended their appreciation to the governments of Turkmenistan and Afghanistan and all partner institutions for convening the Academic Forum, Business Forum, the Special Event on Women’s Entrepreneurship, as well as the Exhibition and the Business Matchmaking Event in the framework of RECCA VII and stressed the importance of effective follow-up on the outcomes of these events. They also welcomed the successful convening of the RECCA Business Forum in Istanbul in March this year and thanked the government of Turkey for hosting this event.

The participants also thanked the RECCA Secretariat for the excellent work including in preparing the conference documents and stressed the importance of continued support to the Secretariat in the new phase of RECCA’s development.

The participants took note with appreciation of the multiple interests expressed by RECCA regional countries to host the next RECCA meeting.